

**The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun
Bhuridatta Thera**
Meditation Master

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Nyanasampanno
Of Wat Pa Barn Tard, Udorn Thani
Translated into English
By
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Writer's Note

The biography here presented reveals the life and manner of practice of the late Venerable Meditation Master Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatto. It is the result of compiling of information generously supplied by a number of his contemporary disciples who had been under his guidance at different times. Its correctness is therefore fairly reliable, though, of course, it is impossible to expect each of his disciples to recollect every word of his instruction and every place and event of his life. But again it is impossible to wait until perfection and entirety are obtained. The longer one waits, the more the significant details are sure to fade away from the memories of his contemporary disciples. Future generations would then be deprived of a worthy example, someone whom they can look up to. It is in view of this fact that the following biography is presented, with the hope that at least something may be better than nothing at all.

The method of presentation here follows that of the ancient compilers who recorded the biographies of some of the Noble Disciples in various texts with the hope that they may be encouraging examples for posterity. If anything which the late Venerable Phra Acharn Mun has himself related seems 'inappropriate', the writer hereby asks the readers' forgiveness. It is for the sake of those interested in this aspect of Buddhism that this work has been attempted. The writer must admit that he cannot help but feel uneasy at his own efforts.

Boowa

Translator's Preface

In the following translation, every attempt has been made to capture the full meaning of the Thai original, which in some cases meant getting at that between the lines, and as such this translation cannot be called a word-for-word translation. All insertions of the translator are indicated by means of brackets, and all footnotes, unless otherwise indicated, belong to the translator. It was felt necessary to add footnotes to make clearer the text itself either because of other possible meanings to be understood by it, or because of lack of familiarity with Buddhist terms or bhikkhus' practices by the Western reader, for whom this book is intended. The section of Supplementary Notes included at the end of the work is also for this same purpose.

The translator would like to dedicate his efforts at this work to all those who are determined to transfer the Dharma from the Scriptures to their minds, and who care to brave the suffering which leads to the end of suffering, and who wish to see 'fresh' footprints of the Buddha and His Noble Disciples in the present time.

Siri Buddhasukh
22nd December 2519/1976

Transcribers' Note

This is an electronic transcription of the second printing (1982) of Siri Buddhasukh's English translation. It has been carried out with the heartfelt wish that whoever reads this book may be inspired in their practice of the Buddha's teachings.

The transcription has been produced largely as a verbatim copy of the translation, only making changes to obvious spelling mistakes and a few other typographical errors. The process has been carried out carefully in stages, using optical character recognition (OCR) and proof reading. Even so, it is quite likely that there remain some errors and omissions, for which the transcribers would like to apologize.

Thanks are expressed to Sebastian Wong and Mananya Pattamasoontorn for providing copies of the book from which to carry out the work.

Ong Lee Lin, Li Chun and Paul Trafford
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The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatto Meditation Master

Phra Acharn Mun was the best-known meditation-master of his time, being genuinely revered by all his close disciples. From the sermons and instructions regarding high dharma delivered by him, it was obvious to these close disciples what his level of attainment was. Their indelible impression gained therefrom has always served to testify to that fact. His disciples included lay followers as well as bhikkhus [monks] perhaps from all parts of Thailand, and also from the neighboring country of Laos. From the first day to the last, his life was splendid, both as a layman and as a bhikkhu. So flawless was his life that a diamond or any other gem cannot compare with its matchless rarity and purity.

He was born into the family of Kankaew with Nai Kamduang as his father and Nang Jan as his mother, both being Buddhists by tradition. He was born on Thursday 20th January BE 2413 [1870] in the town of Ubol Rajadhani (sub-district Khambong, Khongjiem District). Of his eight brothers and sisters, however only two were still alive on the day of his passing away. He was the eldest, of small stature and fair complexion. He was from childhood, agile and full of vigor, intelligent and resourceful. At fifteen he was ordained as a samanera [novice] in the village monastery of Khambong. Since he was genuinely interested in the study of dharma, it did not take him long to become well-versed in the various sutras taught to him by his teacher. His character and behavior were also reliable, never posing any problems to his friends and superiors.

After two years as a samanera, it was necessary for him to disrobe, as his father had requested it, but the chaste life had had a profound effect on him. He never forgot it and resolved that sooner or later he would return to it. This may have been because of the power of a firm, unshakeable confidence [saddha] deeply embedded in his character. Later at the age of twenty-two, the call of the chaste life seemed irresistible. He begged leave of his parents, who readily gave their consent, being themselves eager to have him ordained as a bhikkhu. They enthusiastically prepared the bhikkhu's requisites for him and had him ordained at Wat Liab in the town of Ubol Rajadhani on 12th June BE 2436 (1893), with Venerable Phra Ariyakavi as his Preceptor, Venerable Phra Kru Sitha as the Announcing Teacher, and Venerable Phra Kru Prajak Ubolguna as the Instructing Teacher during the ordination procedure. He was given the name Bhuridatto [Blessed with Wisdom]. After his ordination he went to practice vipassana [insight] with Phra Acharn Sao Kantasilo of Wat Liab.

His Prophetic Dream

In the early days of his vipassana practice with Phra Acharn Sao, he chose to use the word *buddho* as the preferred theme of meditation. It did not at first produce the peace such as would have been expected, which sometimes made him doubtful of its value, but he continued his efforts which in time resulted in peace enough to cool his heart. Then one night he had a dream:

He felt himself walking out of the village and right into a dense jungle with trees and undergrowth almost impenetrable in many places. But he managed to go through them all, and finally emerged to find a meadow stretching on before him to the horizon. Again he continued his journey with persistent efforts. On the way he came across a felled log of a tree known in vernacular Thai at 'jat'. The huge log had been felled so many years before that it was partly submerged in the

ground with part of the bark and inner layer rotting away. He then climbed up and walked on it, contemplating the log as no longer capable of growth¹. He knew that birth for him in this cycle of births and deaths was to be finished. He equated the felled 'jat' log with his previous 'jati' or births [which included deaths as well]. That it was then incapable of growth was symbolic - if he did not give up his efforts, this birth would be his last. The meadow extending to the horizon in all directions was the infinity of rebirths and re-deaths succeeding one another like a snake eating its own tail.

While he was standing there contemplating these symbolic meanings, there appeared a great white horse walking towards him. He was moved to mount it, and at that moment found himself astride the horse and galloping off at full speed. He had no idea where he was going and why, but felt that he must have been carried quite a long way in that vast, measureless terrain. On the way he happened to glance at a glass case with the Tipitaka [Pali Canon] in it. The case was intricately designed and was a beautifully silvery-white. As if in response to his feelings, the horse carried him to the Tipitaka case. He dismounted, hoping to open the case and look at the Tipitaka within, while the horse, having fulfilled its mission, disappeared instantly. This spot was at the end of the vast, open land. From there could be seen a steaming, uninhabited jungle made impassable with thorny, twisted bushes. He then made his way to the case, but before opening it to have a look at the Tipitaka inside, he woke up.

This prophetic dream gave him the assurance that he would be able to achieve his goal within this lifetime, provided he did not give up his efforts. From then on he committed himself to more rigorous practice, with the mental recitation of *budhho* controlling every moment and movement day and night. He continued to practise the dhutanga [ascetic] practices which he had strictly observed from the time of his ordination until the time of his death. These were: wearing rag robes; refusing robes offered to him by hand; going out for alms-round, except on the days he decided to fast; refusing food bought later, accepting only that put into the alms-bowl during his alms-round; having only one meal a day, refusing food offered later; eating within the alms-bowl; wearing three robes [excluding the bathing cloth which has now become necessary]; and dwelling in forest areas, which may be under trees, in valleys, within caves or under cliffs [except for the brief periods when he was invited to a town].

He also occasionally observed the other remaining dhutanga. His observance of these ascetic practices was outstanding and can hardly be equaled by anyone at present. He was always steadfast and determined, never being fickle in whatever he had set his heart upon, be it 'external' practice [dhutanga, etc.] or 'internal' practice [vipassana]. His chaste life was entirely devoted to the goal of Deliverance, with all his movements continuously controlled by his efforts to eradicate the defilements. Little chance was there for pride and vanity to intrude into his mind, in spite of the fact that he was still at that time a worldling². He was different from others, however, in that he was constantly on the alert against such defilements, always putting up a fight and attacking them with courage. This we know from his later narration.

¹ The meaning here is symbolic. The Thai name of this particular tree is 'jat' which is pronounced the same in Thai as the Pali word 'jati', which means 'birth', the final 'i' being dropped.

² Pali 'puthujjana' - one who has not yet attained to one of the four stages of Noble Ones: Stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, and pure or enlightened one. See supplementary notes at the end of the book for further explanation.

When he felt that his mind was firmly established for contemplative activity, he recollected his prophetic dream and came to realize that the life of a householder is the conglomeration of all kinds of suffering, being like an immense thicketed forest where lurk all kinds of dangers, whereas the chaste life, supported by efforts of renunciation, would serve to carry him through that dangerous land to the vast, open meadow, the place of security with an unobstructed view. The great white horse, then, was the mode of rigorous practice which would take him to Deliverance and to the intricately designed Tipitika case. However, due to his own imperfections he was not able to open the Tipitika case and was therefore not to be well-versed in the academic side of the Doctrine. Thus he was not to be equipped with the fourfold *patisambhida nana*[fluency of discernment]³, which is required of one who is unflinchingly resourceful in the means and methods of teaching, with the heights and depths of wisdom like those of the sky and ocean, being thereby able to teach all sentient beings in the Three Realms [bhava]⁴. His accumulation of merit [parami] in the past was not enough, so he said, and that was why he was given only a chance to look at the outside of the Tipitika case and was not able to go through its contents. This indicated that his ability to teach others would be that of teaching them what to do, but that he wouldn't be able to put it into formal, technical language. Whether this is true or not, one thing is clear to those close disciples who had been instructed by him and who had practiced under his guidance: so wonderful and impressive was each and every theme of his instructions and sermons that it is beyond the power of words to describe them. Where on earth in modern times could one find such a never-to-be-forgotten way of instruction in dharma?

Visions in Samadhi

One day, while using *buddho* in his meditation practice at Wat Liab, his mind became calm. There appeared an image⁵ of a bloated, festering corpse, with vultures, crows and dogs scrambling after it in front of him, tearing it to pieces and scattering it all over. He felt a strong feeling of disgust and weariness. After the mind had withdrawn from this meditation image, he regularly kept it in his mind's eye during every moment of the night and day, be it walking, standing, sitting or lying. The meditation sittings that followed were also based on the corpse.⁶ Continued contemplation on the corpse transformed it into a glass disc floating in front of him. With further contemplation of the disc came an endless panorama of a variety of objects and scenes, there being apparently an inexhaustible pattern of changes as a result of his 'chase' or curiosity, his insatiable desire to see what would come next. One moment he appeared to be climbing a high mountain, then he saw himself carrying a sword, wearing a pair of shoes, walking back and forth on the mountain. At another moment there appeared before him a wall with a door; he opened the door and saw a few bhikkhus meditating inside. Then the scene widened to show cliffs and caves nearby, some with hermits inside. Still at another moment he saw what seemed to be a cradle or basket being lowered from the cliff. He saw himself get into the basket and be lifted up the precipice and there he saw a big boat with a square table in it. The mountain was surrounded by a bright light. He then saw himself having a meal on the mountain. Such was how the ever-changing panorama unfurled itself before him, leading him nowhere.

³ See supplementary notes.

⁴ See supplementary notes.

⁵ Pali 'nimitta'. See supplementary notes.

⁶ See supplementary notes

For three months an endless and indescribable pattern of change occurred during meditation, with no end in sight. The inward result was far from satisfactory. After such a sitting the mind was just as susceptible to intruding and distracting influences driving him to spasmodic joys and sorrows as before. He could gain no poise or balance from his meditation. He was then convinced that this certainly was NOT the right path leading to Deliverance. Otherwise, poise and peace of mind, not this emotional sensitivity, would have been the result. This kind of sensitivity, he thought, can be expected of an ordinary man who knows nothing of mind-development. It is certain, he concluded that this chase or directing the attention towards external objects and events was against the principle of mind-development, thus depriving him of the inward bliss and peace that should have been expected.

Thenceforward he reversed his focus of attention, bringing it back to the body, making it traverse the whole body in different planes or dimension - vertically and horizontally, upwards, downwards and sideways - always under the scrutinizing eye of mindfulness (sati). But most of his time was spent in walking meditation (jankamana). During his occasional meditation sittings he did not allow the mind to retreat to the condition of one-pointedness, but had it regularly contemplate the various parts of the body. The period of sleep was also preceded by meditation based on the body.

The Right Method Discovered

Having tried this method for several days, he began his sitting meditation using the nature of his body as the central theme, this time allowing the mind to retreat to the condition of one-pointedness in order to see what would then happen. Since the mind has been properly trained and tamed for several days, but had not yet gained its well-earned rest, the expected retreat came unexpectedly fast and easily. At that instant the body seemed to break into two parts, with the simultaneous and automatic knowledge that 'beyond doubt, this is the right way'. This condition of one-pointedness was characterized by the firm establishment of the mindfulness of the body, thus preventing the mind from wandering aimlessly 'outside'. It was this introspective method that he adopted and later adapted and modified for higher practices and efforts. This was the vital turning point of his life of earnest practice. The previous three months had been wasted in curiosity's chase after visions, a drawback of not having a competent meditation-master's guidance and supervision. At the least it causes unnecessary delay, while at worst it leads a seeker astray and drives him to various evils and miseries.

The Declining Situation at that Time

Phra Acharn Mun, at the time he embarked on the practice of mind-development, used to say that there was little interest in this important aspect of Buddhism. To lay disciples the practice of mind-development seemed to be something strange, something alien to Buddhism. People were often frightened of seeing a dhutanga bhikkhu walking in the distance. They would all run back to their village, if it were near, or they would run into the nearby forest. In an instant the bhikkhu would be left all alone. Just imagine how lost he would be, especially when he, a stranger in that area, wanted to find his way to the nearest village or district.

Sometimes the bhikkhu came across some women and children collecting vegetables or fishing in a mountain stream. At the sight of the approaching bhikkhu, the women would be horrified, shouting to each other: "Here comes Phra Dham!" Throwing down their baskets or whatever they were carrying, not caring whether anything would be broken or lost, they would scurry for the nearest hiding place. The children, now being left alone after the shrieking of their mothers, would be struck with horror. They would run this way and that, not knowing where to go, while their mothers, hiding, would still be too afraid to come out and help them. Faced with this commotion, 'Phra Dham' had no other choice but to sadly go on his way. Any attempt to console the children would aggravate the situation, resulting in louder shrieks and more fright. It was not until 'Phra Dham' was out of sight that the commotion would stop. Then the mothers would come back to comfort their children, and seeing that there was no one missing, would recall the moments of encounter with this frightening 'thing' and sometimes could not help but laugh at their own shrieking and running for their lives. Then the daily rounds of fishing and collecting vegetables would be resumed.

Such was how the people in the region viewed dhutanga bhikkhus. The sight of them was very unusual and no doubt it provoked feelings of apprehension and fear, especially in women and children. It was obvious how, at the early stage of his life as a dhutanga bhikkhu, there were few who took any interest in him due to their own mis-apprehension. However there were understandable reasons for this: firstly, he was always strictly self-controlled, not easily acquaintable with anyone except after long association and understanding; secondly, his set of robes - upper, inner and outer ones - together with his other requisites were of a rather dull color. Superficially he looked more awe-inspiring than delightful and pleasing to the eye at first glance.

During his wanderings, he wore yellowish-brown robes dyed with gum extracted from the heartwood of a Jackfruit tree. Slung across one shoulder was his klod [umbrella larger than what is normally used, especially made for the dhutanga bhikkhu]. Across the other shoulder was his alms-bowl in its bag. When traveling together, dhutanga bhikkhus walked one after the other in a long line. For those who had never seen such a sight, their dull-yellowish brown robes [the way of wearing them and the utensils they carried, such as a water kettle hanging by their side] were little more than something out of the ordinary to think about, but to others who were acquainted with this type of bhikkhu and their mode of practice, such a sight was delightful and impressive.

Many there were who, not knowing Phra Acharn Mun at first, grew to respect and admire him when he came to stay with them, continually impressing them with his instructions. They were affectionately drawn to him as their dharma-instructor, establishing themselves on the right path of the Buddha-dharma. This is how a dhutanga bhikkhu who genuinely follows the path of righteousness can approach the people, quietly performing social and humanitarian services. In his own deportment, how he conducts himself in conformity to the dharma he preaches, that will appeal to the people and attract them to the right path.

Mindfulness Always Present

It is customary for dhutanga bhikkhus to wander forth, seeking places of seclusion in remote areas in order to devote themselves entirely to the eradication of defilements, and so it was for Phra Acharn Mun, who, after the three months' Rains Retreat each year, made it a rule to head for the mountains and forests with a group of houses or a small

village nearby in which he might go for his alms-food. He spent more time in the Northeastern region than in any other part of the country, since this region abounds in mountains and forests near such towns as Nakhorn Panom, Sakol Nakhorn, Udorn Thani, Nongkhai, Loey and Lomsak, and in the Kingdom of Laos in such towns as Tha Kaek, Vientienne and Luang Prabang, where there are great forests and high mountains. For him the eradication of defilements was the most important, irrespective of the place or position of the body, whatever time of day or night. Never had there been in his mind any thoughts of construction work. All his efforts were devoted to eradication and mind-development. For this purpose he therefore always preferred seclusion, living and going places alone, with Deliverance as his sole aim.

He was always steadfast, this being characteristics of all his efforts. Ever since his discovery of the right method, his progress was steadily strengthened by its repeated exercise. The body was repeatedly dissected, analyzed and then dissolved by the Eye of Wisdom until experience and expertise were attained. The mind reinforced by uninterrupted effort, was increasingly blessed with poise and peace. According to him, every one of his movements was never divorced from the eradication of defilements, no matter where he stayed. Whether in going out for alms-food, sweeping the floor, washing a spittoon, sewing or dyeing robes, having a meal, walking to and fro either within or without the monastery [his mindfulness was always present as a controlling factor behind such movements and positions of the body, which served as instruments from which great benefit could be reaped. Only during sleep was such mindfulness absent.] Once he felt himself wake up, he would never continue lying down, since that would have bred a habit of laziness and indulging in sleep. Instead he would instantly get up, wash his face and begin his efforts to eradicate defilements. If after washing a feeling of sleepiness still persisted, he would defer his meditation sitting for a time, fearing lest he should unwittingly fall asleep. To counteract sleepiness he resorted to walking meditation, the speed of which would be increased to drive away that persistent feeling of sleepiness. When the desire for sleep had subsided, or when the body was fatigued and needed a rest, he would then resume his sitting meditation.

In the morning when it was time to go for alms-food, he dressed himself in his three robes - under robe, upper robe and outer robe. With his alms-bowl in its bag slung across one shoulder, he went into a village with mindfulness always present, making the walking to and from the village another exercise in mindfulness, the mind continually under control. Returning to where he was then staying, he would take the food from his alms-bowl and sort it out. He generally refused food offered him later, accepting only the food that was put into his alms-bowl during the alms-round. Only later when he was very old, did he allow himself the leniency of food offered afterwards.

His Manner of Eating

Once he had put the food he thought he could consume back into his alms-bowl, he would stop to contemplate [paccavekhana]⁷ its repulsiveness. Contemplation of this sort is to prevent the fires of craving [greed and attachment for foods the taste of which one likes, and aversion to the food one dislikes] from arising and permeating itself in the

⁷ Here it need only be noted that the bhikkhu contemplates food from the point of view that it is only for the purpose of maintaining the health and strength of the body. It is not eaten to make the body sleek, fat or beautiful, and it is certainly not eaten for enjoyment. For further details of this contemplation, see the supplementary notes.

natural hunger for food and the weariness of the moment. After this contemplation of the repulsiveness of food, he would begin to partake of the food mixed in his alms-bowl. Throughout the whole process of eating, every mouthful, every movement, was to be safeguarded by continual mindfulness of its repulsiveness. Such a way of eating is righteous on the part of a bhikkhu.⁸ After his meal was finished, he would wash, wipe and dry his bowl, exposing it to the rays of the sun for a few moments to insure its complete dryness, and then return it to its bowl-bag to be put in a proper place where it could not be damaged.

His inner struggle would then actively begin once again, with more effort being progressively made towards hunting down defilements within. There is no need to describe in what ways a struggle such as this is beset with difficulties and defeats. It often happens that the fighter is the one being fought and the hunter is the one being hunted. Defilements, instead of being consumed, often turn out to be consumers themselves, all the former good intentions and ideals of the aspirant going up in smoke. Defilements are crafty in wielding their powers of sabotage, even right before one's very eyes, lulling us into their power and keeping us all at bay. It was only the Buddha who was first able to eradicate them once and for all from his mind, and who, having achieved such a decisive victory himself, was overwhelmed with compassion for suffering people and took pains to blaze a trail for those pioneering spirit. A number of people who cared and who dared to follow in his footsteps took up the struggle with courage and patience, backed by an unshakable faith, and who later became known as the Third Gem of the Triple Gem, the Sangha or the Noble Disciples in the best sense of the term. Phra Acharn Mun was also following this same Path with devotion and unwavering confidence.

The Drawback of Lacking a Competent Teacher

Having finished his meal, the Venerable Acharn would proceed to a specially cleared track for walking meditation practice⁹. The remainder of the day, will be devoted to the eradication of the defilements, which bind all human beings to the cycle of endless births and deaths. He never allowed defilements to mock him or to make a fool of him. He steadily increased his practice of meditation and his insight was continually strengthened, both being developed together and in conjunction with each other. Except occasionally, his practice was steadily promoted and he enjoyed the bliss which resulted from it. There were times, however, when he encountered problems which seemed unsolvable and when he seemed to end up in a blind alley. Due to the lack of a competent teacher, he had to depend on his own strenuous struggles. Such struggles caused delays before the problem could be solved and the blind alley forced open, and such obstacles always threatened to breed danger and evil. This confirmed the truth of the importance of a *kalyanamitta* [a good friend or a competent teacher] to an aspirant in mind-development [which was also mentioned by the Buddha]. Lack of

⁸ This way of eating makes the bhikkhu the rightful owner of the food which has been obtained by others' sweat and hard labor. Such a bhikkhu is worthy of veneration in that he has lived to the mode of behavior which is expected of a bhikkhu. Such a bhikkhu may be called 'one who eats as the Buddha's inheritor' and 'one who eats as the rightful owner'. This is in contrast to those bhikkhus who observe the monastic discipline but who do not contemplate the repulsiveness of food, taking delight in those foods which they enjoy and feeling averse to those which they dislike; and the bhikkhu who observes no monastic discipline and who is shameless in eating food obtained through others' labors. Such bhikkhus are thieves who rob the people who have offered them food.

⁹ See supplementary notes

kalyanamitta, on the other hand causes both delays and dangers and is a serious drawback for all aspirants.

Sometimes on his wanderings he accompanied Phra Acharn Sao, his meditation master. When he asked Phra Acharn Sao to solve his problems, however, Phra Acharn Sao merely said that it was beyond his experience and therefore he could offer no solution.

"Your mind is so fleeting," Phra Acharn Sao said, "it tends to go to extreme. One moment it soars high into the sky; at another it plunges deep into the earth; then it rushes under the ocean, again darting high into the air. Who on earth will be able to overtake such a mind? You must check it yourself and solve your own problems."

With advice such as this, it was apparent that he had to rely solely on his own persistent efforts, and how painful it would be before any obstacle which presented itself could finally be surmounted!

According to Phra Acharn Mun, Phra Acharn Sao's character was serene and tranquil. One of his unique abilities during sitting meditation was levitation. While practicing sitting meditation, Phra Acharn Sao would sometimes feel himself floating and this caused him surprise and uncertainty. One time, in order to check out this feeling, he emerged from his meditation and opened his eyes. At that time he was about one meter away from the floor, and his sudden emergence from his meditation brought him crashing to the floor with a thud. That incident caused him a painful hip for several days. Next time he was more cautious. When he next felt himself levitating, he slowly opened his eyes with mindfulness, not completely discarding his meditation, and he saw that he was really floating above the floor! To make doubly sure, he put a small article between the nipa leaves of the thatched roof of his hut before beginning his sitting meditation. When he again felt himself levitating, he once again with mindfulness slowly took that small article in his hand, not withdrawing his mind from the state of meditation, and after that he gradually let himself down to the floor. Holding that small article in his hand, he was convinced that he had really been floating above tile floor during his meditation. This didn't happen every time, of course, but this material evidence was proof of the fact that it did occur sometimes. In other respects, however, unlike Phra Acharn Mun, the mind of Phra Acharn Sao was not so fleeting and rebellious; nor was his mode of practice spectacular, risky and comprehensive in its resources and results.

Former Resolutions

Phra Acharn Sao was said to have made a resolution to become a paccekabuddha [Silent Buddha]¹⁰. In the early stages of his practice, whenever he intensified his effort, this former resolution would step in and check his progress towards Enlightenment. This resolution obviously became an obstacle to the realization of the Cessation of Suffering within this lifetime. He therefore determined to give it up in order to unload the burden of passing from death to death for so long a time, and telescoped his ultimate goal to the present life. From then on he progressed steadily and more rapidly until he reached his destination of Security. He was not resourceful in the art of teaching others, however, possibly because of his own resolve to become a Silent Buddha who is Self-Enlightened but who is not much interested in teaching others. That he was able to change such a

¹⁰ In the time when the Doctrine of the Buddha will be lost to the world.

resolution was perhaps because it was not yet decisive and inflexible in strength, and therefore still subject to be changed.

Even Phra Acharn Mun himself had made a resolution to become an All-Enlightened Buddha. We learned of this from the Venerable Acharn himself. He abandoned that resolution when he began his wanderings as a dhutanga bhikkhu, having realized that such a fulfillment would take him aeons of wandering in the cycle of births and deaths, during which he should have to encounter and endure untold suffering. As in the case of Phra Acharn Sao, whenever he intensified his efforts in the earlier stages of his practice, there was a tendency towards hesitation which checked his progress in favor of his former resolution. After he had resolved to abandon that resolution, however, he felt relieved of a burden and steadily progressed along the Path towards Attainment. That he was able to change such a resolution was probably because it had not yet become strong enough to be irreversible.

In the early stages of practice, the two Venerables used to travel together on their wanderings to various towns and provinces in the North-east. Despite their differences in character and inclinations, they preferred to keep each other's company. Phra Acharn Sao was reserved in words and therefore laconic in giving instructions. His mind was not as restless and dynamic as that of Phra Acharn Mun, and he was therefore less experienced and interested in teaching. Whenever he had to give a sermon, he concentrated what he had to say into a few sentences, for example, "You should avoid evil and do good. Do not waste your life as a human being. We are superior to animals. Do not behave like animals, otherwise we would be worse than they are and we shall go to the hell which is more miserable than their hell." With words such as these he would step down from the pulpit and return to his kuti [hut] paying no attention to anyone. But that was to be expected of someone like him who hardly ever spoke more than a few sentences a day. His actions, however, were really exemplary, for he was known to be able to sit in the same place for hours. His walking meditation also lasted several hours. His stature and demeanor were impressive and dignified, always giving delight and respect to all who saw him. Like Phra Acharn Mun, he had a large following of bhikkhus and lay disciples.

Both meditation masters were known to have respected each other and have been intimate with each other. In the early period they would be seen dwelling and traveling together, both in and outside the period of the Rains Retreat. It was only much later that they would dwell in two different places, but even then not far distant from each other so that an occasional visit could be paid the one by the other. It was also during this later period that each had an increasing number of disciples which would have made staying together impossible because such a large group would have been too great a burden on those who provided for their shelter and sustenance. Each, however, was concerned about the health of the other and often asked concerning the other's health whenever there was a disciple of one or the other coming to pay his respects. It was also customary for one to ask a disciple to convey his kindest regards to the other on his behalf. Whenever one referred to the other in the midst of his bhikkhus, it was always in a way which showed respect and kindness for the other's virtues. There was never any kind of criticism or blame indicating ill will.

A Mind Ultra Dynamic and Nimble

Phra Acharn Mun admitted that Phra Acharn Sao's candid comment on the nature of his mind was quite true. It used to be restless, dynamic, and therefore difficult to train and control. It tended to extremes, knowing no point of balance - now it soared into space, now it plunged deep into the earth, now it rushed across the ocean. Even in the early stages of his practice, whenever his mind reached a point where it was to some degree calm, in a flash it would be susceptible to some external stimuli, much to his own surprise and frustration. Such an occurrence has been mentioned above - the incident when the vision of a corpse changed into a panorama of an endless variety of forms and shapes. Even after he had discovered the right way, his mind often stole away when it attained to a degree of one-pointedness. It would then 'reach out', becoming aware of a variety of things never dreamed of before. Sometimes it darted to the heavenly realms, admiring the joys and glories to be found there, for hours. At other times it plunged into the hell realms, touring them and taking pity on the beings suffering there the fruits of their former deeds.

He often engaged himself in such 'sight-seeing' tours, not paying attention to the time that he was wasting. At that stage he was not yet equipped with discriminating wisdom, able to distinguish real experiences from false or imaginary ones. He would later advise his disciples that these kinds of adventuring should be attempted only after the mind is well equipped with the protection of discriminating wisdom in order to prevent undue absorption and self-delusion. For a nimble and dynamic mind, even a split second not guarded by mindfulness is enough to let it escape and become attuned to external circumstances. After the mind has been well trained and controlled, it becomes invaluable when deliberately sent forth to pick up messages from outside.

In the early days, when he was not able to keep up with his own nimble and over-active mind, it often troubled him by paying truant. When for example, he forced it to contemplate the body down to the feet, it would flash out of the body and penetrate the ground. When on the other hand it was brought back to the body, in an instant, it again jumped upwards into the air, flitting back and forth there with pleasure and delight, showing no interest in coming back down. Only with a forcible pull of mindfulness could it be made to obey and come back to the body for contemplative purposes. The state of one-pointedness at that stage came forth deep and strong, so that mindfulness was able to keep up with it. This was like a person suddenly falling down a precipice, reaching the ground instantly but the mind remained only for a moment in that profound and unshakeable condition. It would then withdraw and enter the next lower stage called upacara samadhi [literally 'entering the wandering within'] it then wandered without control, catching glimpses of things here and there [in the various planes of consciousness].

At that time he was greatly vexed by this characteristic of his mind which defied any restraint, being quicker and more nimble than the curbing force of mindfulness. Since this was his own private internal affair, and as he had no one to whom he could turn for counsel, it caused him considerable frustration for some time. The force of mindfulness had to be developed and strengthened to counteract a mind that was so fleet of foot. This period of determined struggle against his ultra-dynamic mind was painful and discouraging. But the wild stallion of his mind was finally broken, and once brought under control and made obedient, it proved to be of inestimable advantage. So wonderful was its power coupled with that of mindfulness and wisdom, that it turned out to be a wishing ring able to serve unexpected and almost unlimited purpose.

Phra Acharn Mun was nobly courageous and sagacious, being resourceful in his training methods, both for himself and others. It was difficult for any of his disciples to match this aspect of his character. The writer, from his stay with the Venerable Acharn and from his experiences gained there, can affirm that the Venerable Acharn was really unique. In character he was very gallant and correspondingly relentless and unflinching in his mode of practice. His methods for taming the wild stallion of mind were ingeniously diversified to suit the circumstances, on some occasions threatening and on others soothing with gentle instructions, this to match the mind which was itself likewise resourceful and defiant, rebelling against all attempts at curbing it. It is this kind of mind that always makes up a variety of excuses and sinister accounts in order to discourage or distract the aspirant whenever he is off his guard, even for a split second.

All of this suffering and all of these delays were, according to the Venerable Acharn, due to the lack of a competent teacher to offer counsel or helpful hints as to what course to follow. His is really the life of an exceptional self-made man who never allowed himself to flinch before any obstacle that came his way. It was the case of a lone fighter struggling with courage and persistence that defied even the mountain of forces arraigned against him. No precedent was to be expected of any fighter known to him who could offer a time-saving lesson. He often told this to his disciples to remind them of the advantages they enjoyed through his counsel and his company. He warned them not to be overconfident and if ever there was a case of doubt on their part, he was right there to give them whatever assistance or advice was necessary.

In the early days of his practice, the Venerable Acharn journeyed to the border town of Nakhorn Phanom and then crossed over to the forests and mountains of Tha Kaek in the Kingdom of Laos, where he attained to some inward bliss and peace. The territory abounded with ferocious tigers, more terrible, so it was said, than those in Thailand. They were mostly man-eaters, often attacking the Vietnamese people who lived there. These people, however, were rather indifferent to these ferocious beasts. They never seemed to have learned the lesson of self-protection, even though some of their own friends had recently been carried off by tigers in front of their very eyes. They would recklessly venture into those places where tigers were still known to be roaming about and where their friends had not so long before been carried away. Perhaps it was a case of 'familiarity breeds contempt.'

One peculiar thing about the Vietnamese people was that they never joined together to help a friend in danger. While staying overnight in some part of the forest, for example, if a friend lying close by was attacked by a tiger, the rest ran off in different directions, each trying to save his own skin, leaving the unfortunate victim to his fate. Before long they would regroup and move to another place nearby to rest for the night, being completely indifferent to the frightening drama which had just taken place. It seemed that they possessed no more intelligence than children, rarely learning anything and simply being heartless. The writer, with some experience and acquaintance with these people, can testify to this fact.

These Vietnamese were sometimes known to have taken part in lumbering work in remote tiger-infested districts. Singly or in groups, they would stay there overnight without any signs of fear. Whether coming into the village or returning to their camp at night, one man was able to make the trip with complete indifference. Asked whether or not they were afraid, they said that tigers in Thailand were not man-eaters, some even being afraid of men. Those in their country, so they said, were mostly man-eaters and much larger. They were more ferocious and travelers staying overnight in a forest had to build

an enclosure like a pig-sty. In some places even the villagers did not dare leave their houses during the night, otherwise they would be fearlessly attacked by tigers. They also accused the Thai people, who didn't dare go into the forest alone, of being cowards.

While Phra Acharn Mun was staying in tiger-infested areas, however, there wasn't one tiger which gave him any trouble. Only their tracks were to be seen or their roars to be heard at night, but never was there an actual tiger which came either to terrify him or to make a meal of him. He himself was also not much interested in tigers, for he was more afraid of not attaining to the Cessation of Suffering within this lifetime than of these ferocious beasts. He often told his disciples of his travels in such dangerous territories as these, treating these trips and his stays there as mere commonplace happenings. Never did he mention anything of his fear.

Phra Acharn Mun wandered throughout the Northeastern villages and towns from the beginning of his practice until he had the necessary strength to resist the internal temperaments characteristic of his ultra-dynamic mind as well as external stimuli. After that he journeyed down to the central part of Thailand and stayed for a Rains Retreat at Wat Pathoomwan where he regularly went for instruction and advice from His Eminence Phra Upali Gunupamacariya (Siricando) of Wat Boromnivas in Bangkok.

After the Rains Retreat he journeyed up to the town of Lopburi and stayed at various caves at Phaikwang Cave, Mount Khao Phra Ngarn, and Singto [Lion] Cave. In all these places he speeded up his efforts regularly developing meditation and insight. His mind proved to be steadily: strengthened against internal and external influences, with meditation well-developed and insight correspondingly deepened. To such a mind, everything offered itself as morals and lessons for higher growth and profounder insight. Occasionally he would travel down to Wat Boromnivas to seek the advice of Phra Upali, after which he would once again set out for a place of solitude, this time Sarika Cave in Khao Yai [The Great Mountains] in the town of Nakhorn Nayok.

Adventures at the Sarika Cave

He stayed one year at Sarika Cave, and what happened during that period is quite remarkable, both with regard to external occurrences and internal developments. When he arrived at the village near to the cave, a village whose name was perhaps Bahn Kluey, he requested the villagers to take him to the cave in the mountain. The villagers however were quite unwilling to do so. They said that that cave was a terrible place and told him about the many bhikkhus who had gone to stay there before him and who were known to have been stricken by serious diseases which had driven them away. Some had even been killed by those diseases. That cave was believed to be possessed by a Great Demon with terrible powers who had taken it over as his own. He was known to have wielded his powers indiscriminately against all those who had gone to dwell in 'his' cave, sometimes even frightening them to death. He seemed to prefer to challenge any bhikkhu who dared intrude into his domain, no matter how clever that bhikkhu was in mysticism or black magic, and it often resulted in that bhikkhu being suddenly struck down with illness or his dying a premature death. The villagers were thus unwilling to take him to that cave lest he too be killed like some of those before him.

Phra Acharn Mun then asked the villagers how this Great Demon made himself known. They said that even during the first night whoever was staying in that cave would see in his dreams a tall black Demon coming at him, his face contorted into a frightful look and

giving every impression of his intent to kill. The Demon would then announce that he was the owner and protector of that cave, thus being the sole ruler of that territory. He tolerated no intruders and would immediately set about driving them away, getting rid of everyone who trespassed into his kingdom, and in most cases, those who had ventured there would not be able to stay there for long. Some were known to have left, after the first night, faces contorted with fear and bordering on madness, vowing never to go back to that cave again. Others had died there. Not long before this four bhikkhus, boasting of their mystical powers when they arrived, went up to the cave and were never seen again.

Such was the story of Sarika Cave which, was also reputed to have contained a piece of magical metal which possessed mystical powers, rumors of which often tempted many to go to the cave but of which there has been no account of discovery.

Phra Acharn Mun was not discouraged by the villagers' story and made up his mind to go to the cave and to face whatever would happen there. Instead of being overwhelmed with fear, he looked at it as an opportunity to develop his mindfulness and to learn some valuable lessons. He modestly told the villagers that it was a horrible story which they had related to him, but that he would still like to go up there for a time. He said that if he found it too horrible, then he would come back, but that he would like the villagers to take him there. He said that he had made up his mind a long time ago to come here and to admire the beauty of the place, and therefore, at his insistence, the villagers finally agreed to take him up to the cave.

The First Sign of Illness

His first two or three nights in the cave were uneventful, his body and mind both satisfactorily rested due to the perfect quietness and seclusion of that place. The only noises to be heard were those of the occasional wild animals roaming about the area. On the following night, however, he was stricken with a stomach ache that had troubled him before, but this time it seemed to be much more serious. He sometimes passed blood with his stool and he appeared not to be able to digest food at all, it passing out of his system in exactly the condition it was when it was eaten. He was reminded of the villagers' account of the four bhikkhus who had already died there. He thought to himself that if this illness continued in this way, he could very well be the fifth. When in the morning some villagers stopped by to pay him a visit, he asked them to prepare a herbal medicine from the roots or cores of some nearby trees, but it was all in vain. The condition of his stomach steadily worsened, his body became enfeebled and his will power obviously waned. While taking the medicine he tried to encourage himself, thinking that there ought to be some curative effect if the medicine were to be helpful but after many days it proved useless. What was the use in depending on it?

When he had thought about this, he decided to stop taking such conventional medicines and to resort to the therapeutical effect of the dharma alone, no matter what happened to his body. "Let this body die here in this cave if the power of dharma fails to cure this illness. I have progressed far enough to be fairly certain of the Path, Fruition and Nirvana," he told himself. "Why should I become disheartened and enfeebled by this pain and suffering? If I were to be defeated by this amount of suffering at this stage, what hope would I have when the moment of the dissolution of the body arrived, when wave after wave of suffering would pound to pieces my lines of defense?"

Thinking thus he stopped taking herbal medicines and began his meditation for the therapeutical effect of the dharma alone. Attachment to life was then abandoned, whereupon the body was allowed to undergo its natural curing process. Mindfulness and wisdom together with faith and exertion then hammered on the mind which does not die but which is always death-stricken. No attention was paid to the disease as to whether or not it could be cured or whether it would destroy the body. The dissecting eye of wisdom was directed at vedana [the sensation or feeling of suffering], with the other aggregates [khandha] ruthlessly analyzed. The body [rupa], sensations [vedana], perception [sanna], and mental formations [sankhara] were all brought before the supreme tribunal of scrutinizing mindfulness and wisdom, which continuously dug and uncovered more profound truth. The pitched battle raged from dusk to midnight and ended with the mind being considerably empowered and able to realize the nature of the aggregates, including the gripping pain which had been fully manifesting itself. The illness totally disappeared and the mind withdrew into absolute, unshakable one-pointedness.

At that point came the threefold cessation: pain, disease, and responsiveness of mind. When the mind later emerged to a less profound and more responsive level called upacara, there seemed to be a light radiating from his body and which revealed a tall black man about ten meters high. He was carrying a club about four meters long and as big around as his leg. He threateningly approached the Venerable Acharn and said, "If the Venerable does not leave this place, I will crush you to death with my huge club, which can crush an elephant to the ground with one blow."

The Venerable Acharn communicated with him telepathically and asked, "Why do you want to kill me? I appear to have done no wrong. Why should I deserve such capital punishment when I haven't harmed anyone up here?"

The Demon answered, "I have long been authorized to safeguard this mountain and will not tolerate anyone who dares to challenge me or attempt to overpower me."

"But I challenge no one, nor do I attempt to overpower anyone," the Venerable Acharn said. "It is just to challenge and overpower the defilements which rule human minds that I have come here. It is highly inadvisable that you should harm me, a bhikkhu and a disciple of the Buddha, whose power of loving-kindness encompasses the Three Realms of Existence." The Venerable Acharn continued, "If you are someone who really possesses skilful powers, as you have boasted about, do you have power beyond karma and dharma which are the great laws ruling the masses of beings in the three realms? "

"No," the Demon answered.

"The Buddha possessed the power of eradicating from his own mind the desire to dominate and to harm others," the Venerable Acharn continued. "Do you have such a power?"

"No," the Demon confessed.

The Venerable Acharn began to admonish the Demon, pointing out that his power, if any, was primitive and savage, being detrimental only to himself. "Such powers bring only fiery results, because you don't realize that in consuming others you only consume yourself as a result. This is indeed heavy unwholesome karma. I am a bhikkhu following the Path of Righteousness and this is both for my own benefit as well as others. This is my genuine desire. And now here you come planning to hurt and kill me thinking nothing of

the evil that will drag you to the realm of woe. I care little for my own life but I do take pity on you since you will be consumed by your own power delusion. Just stop and consider whether there is any power in the world which can counteract the result of the evil karma which you are about to perform! Is there any power which you possess over this mountain realm that can supersede the dharma and karma. If you do, then you may do to me whatever you wish. I do not fear death because I will die anyway when the time comes, whether or not you try to kill me. This world is a place of mortals, which includes yourself, who are deluded by power complexes."

All the while the Venerable Acharn was thus admonishing this Demon, the Demon appeared to be frozen, unable to move or speak. As a human being he would have been terribly afraid and ashamed in his defeat. He was spellbound and at the end of the Venerable Acharn's reprimand, he threw down his club in submission, changed himself into a gentle and pious Buddhist the size of an ordinary human being, and then apologized to the Venerable Acharn for his rude manners and evil intention.

"I was struck with wonder and surprise the moment I saw you a few days ago," the Demon said. "I seemed to have been struck by a ray of light, powerful and wonderful, which appeared to have been radiating from you. It had such a strange effect on my aggressive intentions, both weakening and paralyzing. The moment I was enveloped in that impressive light, I was discouraged from doing you any harm. I don't understand why that should have happened. I have never seen anything like it before. You can be sure of one thing, however, my threats were feigned, not real. I have been recognized by the other demons around here as their chief. My threats sprang out of this sense of superiority. We have been used to wielding our powers in evil ways, and as their chief, I was bound to do something to preserve my dignity, in spite of myself. I had no harmful intentions after having been bathed in that light. May the Venerable Acharn please forgive whatever indecent actions I have done towards you today. Forgive me that the burden of guilt may be lifted from my shoulders, a burden already too heavy to bear."

The Venerable Acharn then asked him, now a pious gentleman, if he to experienced suffering, possessing as he did a non-material body, neither bulky nor heavy like that of a human being. Besides that, he is also not burdened with earning a living or seeking shelter, as is the case with man.

Our pious gentleman answered, "Superficially speaking it would appear to be that way, but strictly speaking, there isn't one plane of existence which is absolutely free from suffering. It differs in degree rather than in kind."

The dialogue between the Demon and the Venerable Acharn still went on regarding this mystical subject, but it was so profound that the writer is unable to quote here every passage and would like to apologize to the readers for this deficiency.

At the end of their dialogue the mysterious gentleman, formerly a ferocious Demon, was impressed in the dharma and declared himself a lay devotee, taking the Triple Gem as his Refuge, along with the Venerable Acharn as his material witness and personal teacher. He promised to give all protection to the Venerable Acharn and expressed his earnest wish to have the Venerable Acharn stay there forever. He would be the Venerable Acharn's guardian and would allow nothing to harm him. In fact, he was not really the tall black Demon in whose guise he had appeared to the Venerable Acharn in his meditation vision. He was really chief of the terrestrial angels [rukhhadeva-1iterally

meaning tree spirits] with a great company of followers in the vast mountain area of many towns in that region, such as the town of Nakhorn Nayok¹¹.

It was around midnight when the Venerable Acharn's mind withdrew into the unshakable state of appana-samadhi. Upon emerging from this state, his dialogue with the demon-gentleman continued until about four o'clock in the morning. When he had emerged from the level of meditation [upacara] in which the dialogue had taken place, the disease which had raged during the early stage of his practice had totally disappeared. There was now no need for conventional medicine since his illness had been completely cured by the therapeutical effect of the dharma. He spent the remaining hours before dawn in continued meditation efforts, there being no need for sleep since whatever weariness or tiredness there was had been replaced by strength and vitality.

The Venerable Acharn was thus moved to realize and understand many wonderful things simultaneously: firstly, the power of the dharma which could bring that invisible being to his senses and convert him to the Right Path; secondly, his mind had withdrawn into the unshakable bliss of peace for hours, during which the wonders of such a lofty state were overwhelmingly evident to him; thirdly, the chronic illness which had troubled him for so long was completely cured; fourthly, his mind had attained to a level where many doubts were cleared away; fifthly, his meal taken later in the morning was normally digested; and lastly, many kinds of knowledge occurred to him which he had never dreamed of before, both for the eradication of defilements and on how to apply such methods of eradication to various individuals with different dispositions or tendencies.

The following nights were marked by peaceful efforts and a blissful condition of mind, the body being in perfect health and not troubling him anymore. In the wee hours of the night he received a large group of terrestrial angels who came from various places in that region. They were led by the gentleman-demon, their chief, who introduced them to him. Whenever there were no visitors, he delighted himself with meditation efforts.

Encounter with a Band of Monkeys

After a period of sitting meditation one afternoon, the Venerable Acharn went outside his cave to have a rest, sitting down some distance in front of it, and was contemplating the dharma which the Buddha had discovered and delivered to mankind, realizing how profound and difficult it is for many people to understand and follow. It was a great wonder and blessing for him, so he thought, to have come to understand and follow it, thereby realizing the dharma's many truths. His attainment was not yet complete, as he had expected, but it was fairly certain that the Final Goal would soon be reached, if his life did not end prematurely.

He was thus contemplating the various aspects of the dharma: its Path, Fruition, and Complete Cessation of Suffering, when a large band of monkeys happened to come that way. The leader of the monkey band was some distance in front of it when it suddenly came upon the Venerable Acharn sitting there and eyeing the monkey leader

¹¹ There is now a waterfall in the town of Nakhorn Nayok bearing the name Sarika. The town of Nakhorn Nayok is also the gateway to the Great Mountains (Khao Yai) area, which is now a reserved forest under the supervision of the Forestry Department. This is a vast area covering the three townships of Nakhorn Nayok, Saraburi and Nakhorn Rajasima. However, it is still not known for sure where this Sarika cave is.

from the corner of his eye. The monkey leader must have been struck with wonder as to what it was, that was sitting there for it jumped back and forth in the tree branches, being suspicious of the Venerable Acharn and concerned for the safety of its band. The Venerable Acharn, was able to understand the monkey-leader's feelings and was filled with pity for its apprehension. He began to extend his loving-kindness [metta] to the monkey-leader and to assure him mentally that he was one who followed the path of the dharma and meant no one or no living creature harm, that his band should not be afraid of him, but should freely roam about the place, staying there as long as they wished.

The monkey-leader rushed back to the band following behind chattering "Koke! " meaning "Look out! Something's there! " The band, not yet seeing anything, chattered back "Koke? " "Where is it? " The monkey-leader chattered "Koke! " "There! " and turned his face towards the Venerable Acharn, as if pointing out where 'it' was.

The language of animals is, of course, too mysterious for ordinary people to understand, yet it was understandable to the Venerable Acharn. Having given the danger signal, the monkey-leader told the band not to hurry but to proceed carefully, and he then came back to get a closer look at the 'thing' in front of the cave. The monkey-leader was at once overcome by fear, curiosity and concern for the safety of his band, which was waiting behind. For several minutes it leaped back and forth in the tree branches about twenty meters away from him while the Venerable Acharn mentally observed its moods and thoughts. Finally, the monkey-leader turned to his band and chattered the all clear signal "Koke!" "Go on! No danger now!"

According to the Venerable Acharn, this scene, if we were able to understand their monkey chattering, was both amusing and pitiful. To an ordinary person, monkey chatter appears to have no differences and consequently to be of no significance. But to the Venerable Acharn, this monkey chatter was distinct and definite like the language of man. There was a marked difference in its sounds from the time the monkey leader spotted him sitting there.

"Koke! " "Look there! " he chattered.

"Koke! " "What's there?" "Koke!" "What's happened?" the monkey band chattered back."

"Koke! Kake!" There's something there! It might be dangerous!" the monkey-leader chattered back, and the danger signal echoed in the midst of the band. There was a great noise and a great nervous excitement in the monkey band, each monkey chattering back and forth in pandemonium. This was very much like a group of people who suspect danger and who are almost panic-stricken.

The monkey-leader calmed the band down with "Koke!" "Wait here! I'll go and look again." He came back once again to where the Venerable Acharn was sitting and surveyed him closely, both his personality and movements. Being assured of the harmlessness of the Venerable Acharn and the safety of his band, he went back and chattered "Koke! Kake!" "There's no danger. Go on!" Then all the remaining monkeys came forth with one accord to where the Venerable Acharn was sitting. They jumped up and down, regarding him with suspicion and asking one another what he was and why he had come to sit there.

This part of the story is related here exactly the way the Venerable Acharn told it to his disciples so that the readers can get a good idea of how the monkeys' chattering had meanings which the monkeys were able to understand. After all, it is understandable how this kind of animal came to be suspicious of man since it has been so often victimized by man's traps and cruelties. They therefore couldn't help but be suspicious of the Venerable Acharn, chattering their monkey chatter in much the same way we human beings speak our own languages.

Before long, the monkeys were at ease, paying no heed and having no interest in the 'thing' which they knew would not harm them. They roamed about that place freely from then on and the Venerable Acharn continued to stay there with comfort and in peace.

Such a 'live-and-let live' type of existence, where each can live in harmony with others without suspicion, is a blissful peace in itself. It is generally seen that wherever forest bhikkhus [those who follow the dhutanga way of life] stay, there the forest beasts will assemble in large groups, both the large and the small. They seem to be attracted by his aura of loving-kindness, and, like human beings, are inclined to find a place of shelter and security. The animals differ from human beings in that they do not possess an all-round wisdom and are thus guided solely by the instinct of self-preservation, with only thoughts of finding food and shelter each day.

The Great Sanvega

It happened one night that the Venerable Acharn was strongly overcome by the feeling of sanvega¹², so much so that he was moved to tears. It was then in the meditation hour when his mind withdrew into the state of complete one-pointedness through contemplation on the nature of the body. A profound degree of detachment was attained with the mind in a state of sheer 'emptiness'¹³. At that moment, to his mind, the whole world had vanished. Upon emerging from that profound condition, he contemplated the Buddha's Dharma and Vinaya which had been proclaimed in order to remove the fault of ignorance [avijja] from the minds of men. The more he contemplated the dharma, the more he saw its wonders and profundity and the more he was convinced of the ignorance of men, his own included. People have to be taught how to eat, sleep and to eliminate wastes; they also have been taught how to walk, move, dress, wash, etc., which are the ways and means of preserving the health of the both the body and the mind. Without prior instruction, everyone, irrespective of caste, race or nationality, is most likely to do wrong and to heap suffering upon themselves. Human beings are like children who need instruction and guidance from adults before they can expect a balanced and healthy development.

¹² Sanvega is a term very difficult to render into English as there appears to be no English equivalent. It is a mixture of various feelings: disillusionment, realization of one's own or others' follies, dispassionateness, weariness of the present circumstances, sometimes coupled with pity for or compassion towards others. Sanvega is always characterized by the development of wisdom, to a greater or lesser degree, and is markedly different from mere irritation or disappointment.

¹³ 'Emptiness' here is the literal translation of the Thai 'wahng'. This term is somewhat misleading even in Thai, and in translation is sure to be even more so. It is therefore hoped that the readers will not begin to speculate upon the meaning of this term, but will take it as the English equivalent for a very difficult term and concept.

And for ignorant minds, vanity and self-delusion always do them a world of harm. Their greatness lies in body, birth, name, rank or self-importance. But never did their wisdom grow correspondingly large so that it would be conducive to bliss and peace, both for themselves and others. Worse still, wisdom is neglected and forgotten. This is why there is so much trouble and turmoil is everywhere.

Such was the great sanvega that overcame him that night.

The Aged "Vipassana" Bhikkhu

At the foot of the mountain leading to this eventful cave was a so-called 'vipassana' center with an aged bhikkhu staying there all alone. One night, the Venerable Acharn, wishing to know what the bhikkhu was doing, attuned his mind to that of the bhikkhu, and he knew instantly that, surprisingly enough, the bhikkhu was engaged in managing the affairs of his own family, spending most of his time worrying about past events in the family he had left behind! Later that same night, the Venerable Acharn again 'looked in' on the bhikkhu and found that he was still worrying and planning. At dawn he tried again for a third time to read that bhikkhu's mind and the result was still the same. This aged vipassana' bhikkhu could not stop worrying about his family and planning what he should do and should not do for his children and grandchildren. All these worrying and planning are the affairs of householders and have nothing to whatsoever with vipassana practice and development.

In the morning, the Venerable Acharn went down from the cave into the village for alms-food and on his way back to the cave he stopped and paid a call to that aged bhikkhu. He casually asked him about the progress of his plans to build a new house and about his arranging things for his former wife and children. "You have too many things to plan and worry about," he said. "You hardly had any rest at all last night".

Startled, and with a wry smile, the aged bhikkhu asked, "How do you know all about that?"

"It doesn't matter how I know about it," the Venerable Acharn replied. "You should know about it better since you were the one who spent all night worrying and planning. You didn't get any rest."

Hearing this, that aged bhikkhu turned pale with shame and fear. He stammered and mumbled something to himself and looked as though he was going to faint. Seeing that this had hurt him too much, the Venerable Acharn changed his subject and soon took leave of him and went back to his cave.

Three days later, a lay disciple who was that aged bhikkhu's attendant went up to the cave and the Venerable Acharn asked him about the aged bhikkhu. The lay disciple answered that he had left the previous morning. He said that he had asked him why he was leaving and was told that the Venerable Acharn had delivered him a serious sermon causing him almost to faint. The sermon appeared to have hurt him more than any reproach or blaming him outright could have done since it involved a dharma riddle which had made him shamefully embarrassed. He said that aged bhikkhu said that the Venerable Acharn seemed to know all his thoughts and that he couldn't possibly stay there any longer and be a burden to him.

This lay disciple said that he had tried to dissuade that aged bhikkhu from leaving, telling him that it was illogical for him to think that he will be a burden to the Venerable Acharn, the burden, if any being solely the bhikkhu's own. He should therefore attempt to dislodge it with the Venerable Acharn's help. This would be far better than trying to escape it. That aged bhikkhu was panic-stricken, however, and he insisted he had to go. When asked where he was going, he would only reply that he was going away. He didn't even know himself which place he would run. The lay disciple had a small boy accompany the aged bhikkhu for some distance, but even he didn't know since the aged bhikkhu refused to say anything.

The Venerable Acharn was filled with pity on hearing this, now knowing that what he had done with good intention had produced an adverse effect. That aged bhikkhu was thoroughly frightened and since that day the Venerable Acharn never again tried to read that bhikkhu's mind since it was likely that doing so would only bring about more adverse results. He told the man indirectly about what he had said to the aged bhikkhu, adding that he never thought it would have been taken so seriously. That so-called vipassana center had now become a deserted place because of it.

All that happened concerning this aged bhikkhu was a lesson to him on how to deal with those who came to see him. From then on he never commented directly on others' thoughts. He would mention them, but only in a roundabout way so that the person in question might find out for himself what he was talking about and not be so much hurt. The mind of an ordinary, untrained person is like a tiny tot learning how to walk. It is sure to sway to and fro. An adult can only safeguard it, protect it from getting hurt. He cannot forbid its tottering gait. It is likewise impossible for such an under-developed mind not to be at all times swayed by spasmodic thoughts and moods.

The realization of many more 'new' truths occurred to him while he was staying in this cave, both internal truths and unlimited external ones. He was encouraged and took delight in his practice, taking no notice of the lapse of time. More and more internal truths dawned upon him like a mountain stream gushing forth in rainy season. On clear afternoons he strolled along winding tracks under the shade of trees, enjoying the scenery and solitude while developing his insight meditation. He would return to his cave late in the afternoon, enjoying the company of various kinds of animals that roamed freely in that fertile area. The atmosphere was wonderfully hospitable, each creature going its own way, minding its own business. There was no room for fear since all now took each other for granted, knowing that none meant any harm.

The Venerable Acharn said he took delight in their company, always radiating his loving-kindness towards them. They all share the all-inclusive sufferings of birth, old age, illness and death, so he thought, none having any advantage over the rest in this respect. The level of inner peace development [parami] in man and animals is different. This difference however can sometimes be found working in a paradoxical manner with some animals being essentially more mature than some men. Due to the occasional fruiting of some evil karma, men temporarily suffer its effects in taking an animal birth. Even in the world of man, parallels may be seen in those who are living in miserable states [almost no better than that of animals]. They have to undergo such suffering in these states until the evil karma is exhausted or until there is occasion for the ripening of a virtuous karma, replacing the evil one. A Buddhist is thus advised against treating animals

with contempt since there is good and evil karma in all sentient beings, belonging to man and animals alike.¹⁴

In the evening the Venerable Acharn swept the area in front of the cave and continued his efforts, to eradicate the defilements, alternating sitting with walking meditation. His progress in both the quietude of mind and wisdom, the contemplation of the aggregates, analyzing, dissecting and digesting them on the basis of the three signs of being [tilakkhana] --[changeability, flux, and selflessness or ownerlessness], was steady. Thus was his insight developed, giving him greater assurance of his Final Goal.

Sermons by Arahant Disciples

Occasionally at night arahant disciples of the Buddha would give him sermons while he was sitting in meditation. According to one arahant's instruction, walking meditation should be well-guarded physically and mentally.

"Mindfulness should be fixed upon the theme selected, be it part of the body or any other aggregate. Do not be distracted, thus revealing fickleness and fluctuation. Every movement must be preceded by mindfulness. Do not move about like a person during sleep, unguarded by mindfulness. The daily round of going out for alms-food, partaking of a meal, and defecating and urinating should follow the manner of the Noble Ones [ariya] not the manner of an ordinary, untrained man. Always follow the practice of a recluse [samana], the way of life blessed with composure and equanimity. In every posture of the body do not fail to develop mindfulness and wisdom, which serve to uncover hidden evil. While eating always contemplate the [repulsive] nature of food. Never allow its delicious taste to become a mind-consuming poison. The body may be strengthened by the nourishment the food provides after it is swallowed *without* contemplation, but the mind will then be robbed of its progress by that pleasant taste. This is cutting short one's own development by nourishing the body at the expense of the mind. All this occurs because mindfulness is lacking.

"Wherever a recluse goes or dwells, he must not accumulate mental defilements, which are detrimental to himself, nor should he allow them to reach out and consume others. On the basis of the Noble Practice [ariya-dhamma] defilements are regarded as a real terror. Thus you should be constantly on the alert against every expression of their overflowing stream, each of which is of a similarly destructive power. Standing, walking, sitting, lying down, eating, defecating and urinating, or talking, you must not be without the control of mindfulness. This is the path all Noble Ones have followed. To be without mindfulness or self-control is the breeding ground of evil and defilement, of being entangled in the cycle of births and deaths. He who aims at breaking away from the cycle must stay away from the path leading to the abyss, which will only turn him into an evil, undesirable recluse. Evil food serves no one's purpose. No one wants to live in an evil house. No one wants to see or look at an evil dress. All things evil are loathed by everyone. An evil mind is consequently shunned by virtuous minds. Worse still is an evil recluse who is repulsively loathsome to gods and men alike. Hence the imperative necessity of self-control.

¹⁴ According to Buddhism, the only (ie the minimum) guarantee against rebirth as an animal is the Path of the Stream-winner, called in Pali, Sotapanna, which the Buddha said, is indescribably superior to world conquest, attainment to heaven and even conquest of all the (three) Worlds.

"Of all the nourishment in the world, mind-nourishment is supreme. Supreme in the world is mind. A mind well-nourished is a mind well-established in dharma. A mind knowing itself is a mind which has known dharma. A mind reaching itself is a mind which has known dharma. One's own mind is the priceless treasure. Do not overlook it! The person who misses his own mind is the person who neglects to treat his priceless treasure properly. A thousand births of such a person are but a thousand misses. Having known the mind to be so invaluable, you should not miss it knowingly. This will but cause you regret. This should not happen when you have known about it in advance.

"A human being is an intelligent being. Do not show want of intelligence that is to be expected of a man. That would be a miserable evil. The work of a recluse, both internal and external, is one the world can look up to with confidence. It is flawless and unblemished in both what is to be done and the manner of doing it. It is decent and righteous and should be developed steadily, for your own development. A recluse taking delight in moral practice, meditation, mindfulness, wisdom and exertion is sure to become a samana in the real sense of the term, either at present or in the near future.

"Such is the dharma of one with exertion, patience and endurance, with the determination to fight for the sake of Security and Supremacy. It is the dharma of one who is absolutely delivered from suffering, being without bondage and under no compulsion whatsoever. It is the dharma of the Buddha who is absolutely free and independent who is Teacher of the Three Realms. Realizing the significance of this dharma you will be freed of defilements in a short time. This is the message of dharma for careful consideration. You will experience the wonders of your mind which is already wonderful by its very nature."

The sermon being ended and the arahant having departed, the Venerable Acharn reviewed the instruction, carefully pondering upon its various point in detail. By virtue of the instruction of each arahant who came to him, he was more developed and resourceful, with ever-increasing strength of will and of mindfulness and wisdom.

His attainment to the Path of Non-Returner

The Venerable Acharn said that listening to the arahant's sermon was like listening to the instructions of the Buddha himself, although he himself had never seen the Buddha before. He was thoroughly bathed in ecstatic delight. Time seemed to come to a standstill, and there appeared only the mind clothed by the radiance of the dhamma. It was not until he emerged from this profound state that he came to know that he was still burdened with a physical body, heavy as a whole mountain, the conglomeration of the aggregates, each being a mass of suffering in itself. The coming of the arahants to visit him, and the giving of their instructions on various occasions were outstanding experiences compared with his accounts of events in other places. It was also in this cave that he won through to the path of Non-Returner [anagami].

From the scriptures we learn that with the attainment of this fruition the five lower spiritual fetters [sanyojana] are destroyed: the wrong idea regarding self or personality [sakkayaditthi], doubt or hesitation [vicikiccha], clinging to the efficacy of rites and rituals [silabbataparamasa], sensual desire [raga], and irritation [patigha]. One who has attained to this fruition is perfectly immune against taking birth once again in this world of human beings with bodies composed of the elements [dhatu] of solidity, liquid, heat and

air.¹⁵ If the supreme final Path of the arahant is not yet attained within that lifetime, he will pass on to any of the five subtle, higher Realms of Brahma which are called aviha, atappa, sudassa, sudassi and akaniṭṭha, the differences between them being only the particular degree of subtlety or delicacy which marks one from the rest.

The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun himself told his circle of close disciples that he attained to the path of Non-Returner in that cave. The writer has decided to take note of it here and is ready for the readers' comments. If there is anything improper with making this fact known, let the writer be blamed for his own heedlessness. It is known, however, that the Venerable Acharn Mun had put forth his efforts to eradicate the defilements in that cave for several months. He did this in the way of the samana-dharma with a quiet and cool heart.

Leaving Sarika Cave

The Venerable Acharn had many unexpected and remarkable experiences during meditation, which convincingly repeated themselves for many successive nights. As a result, one night, he was strangely overcome by loving-kindness and compassion for his fellow bhikkhus. That night his meditation was unusually profound, with the added knowledge of both internal and external events. This moved him to tears when he recalled how ignorant he used to be, the benefits of exertion and struggle which he was then reaping, how great was the Buddha's compassion in blazing a trail for his followers, and how complex is the operation of karma, which governs the lives of men and animals. All this may be summed in the passage from the Dhammapada which says 'Sentient beings have karma as their birthplace and as their possession.' He also warned himself, however, that in spite of the many-sided wonder and attainment achieved so far, the ultimate Cessation of Suffering was not yet achieved. More strength, more exertion and a greater degree of mindfulness and wisdom were needed, combined with dedication, before the point of finality could be reached.

He also had the bonus comfort of having had his chronic stomach disease which had plagued him for so long cured by the therapeutical effect of the dharma. His mind was thenceforward firmly established, and although the defilements had not yet been completely eradicated, he had no doubt whatsoever in his manner of practice which steadily progressed and which did not fluctuate as before. He was absolutely certain that he was not speculating or groping in the dark in his practice and that the Absolute Cessation of Suffering was not far away. During that period, the growth of mindfulness and wisdom was steady and constant, requiring no force or coercion. A steady stream of knowledge of both internal and external matters was flowing past his mind's eye, adding to his delight in the dharma. It was then that he was overcome with compassion for his other bhikkhu disciples and wished to have them share his experience and attainment. It was due to this feeling of compassion that he was moved to leave that comfortable and blessed cave in spite of himself, for the Northeastern provinces.

A few days before his departure a number of terrestrial angels, led by their chief who had been converted by the Venerable Acharn some months before, came to see him for his instructions. After teaching them he told them that he would soon leave that place. The terrestrial angels voiced their protest and requested him to stay on there for the sake of their bliss and prosperity. The Venerable Acharn told them that it was his

¹⁵ See supplementary notes

sense of responsibility which moved him to leave. He told them not to be overcome with sadness, that if it were at all possible, and should occasion permit, he would return. These terrestrial angels could not help feeling sad because of their affectionate respect and reverence towards him.

In Bangkok with His Eminence the Venerable Upali

Before the day of his departure, the Venerable Acharn thought of his eminence the Venerable Upali Gunupamacariya of Wat Boromnivas in Bangkok, wondering what it was he was doing at that moment. With the radiance of his mind, he attuned it to the mind of the Venerable Upali and instantly knew that he was contemplating the Law of Dependent Origination (paticcasamuppada). He then took note of the day and the time and when he later came down to Bangkok, he asked the Venerable Upali for confirmation. His eminence confirmed it was and was overjoyed, saying "How clever you are! I am a teacher but I am still no match for you. You have put me to shame." He added that "This is what we should expect from a follower of the Buddha. We must not rest in self-complacency in following the footsteps of the Buddha. There must be those whom others can look up to as the crystallization of the dharma. This confirms the truth that the dharma is timeless, not limited by time or place, except by a person's own laziness. It is because of laziness that the dharma of the Buddha will be lost to the world. It is encouraging that the Venerable Acharn Mun has made such an example of himself."

He was often praised by his eminence the Venerable Upali. Sometimes when his eminence could not make up his mind about something, he would send for the Venerable Acharn and request his counsel and suggestions.

After some time, Phra Acharn Mun left Bangkok for the Northeastern provinces.

Adventure with a Tiger by Phra Acharn Sitha

The Venerable Acharn used to tell his disciples of some of his adventures with tigers. One time he was in the kingdom of Laos, he stayed in a secluded place near a mountain. There he was often visited by a large tiger who liked to watch him curiously at a distance while he was engaged in walking meditation at night. The tiger never seemed to make any threatening gestures whatsoever, but merely roamed about nearby, occasionally roaring whenever he felt like it. Being long used to keeping the wild beasts company, the Venerable Acharn did not pay any attention to it.

One night, a very large tiger paid a visit to another dhutanga bhikkhu who was traveling with the Venerable Acharn but who was staying in another village some distance away. This bhikkhu's name was Sitha. It was night and he was occupied in walking meditation, his meditation track being lit by candles placed in lanterns at either end of the track. The tiger was sitting only a couple of meters away from the track and must have been there for quite some time. It was sitting very much like a house-dog sits. It sat there facing him, quietly watching him walk back and forth. It didn't do anything else but just sit and watch him. Some time later when Phra Acharn Sitha came near to the place where the tiger was sitting he sensed something unusual, perhaps out of the corner of his eye. He turned to that spot and saw his 'watchdog' sitting there, unmoving. It looked more like a big

stuffed doll than a living thing. Acharn Sitha felt no fear, nor was there any harmful intent on the part of the tiger.

He continued his walking meditation undisturbed, but after quite a long time he began to feel compassion for the tiger, thinking that it was wasting its own time sitting there just watching him, and that this time could be better spent in finding food for itself. He had no sooner thought this thought than that tiger gave out an earsplitting roar which reverberated throughout that area. On seeing this reaction, Acharn Sitha quickly changed his thought, mentally telling the tiger that it was out of compassion for him that he had such a thought, since after all, it had to find food for sustenance. But, if it should find it pleasant and comfortable to act a guard for him, so much the better. The tiger didn't react at all to this and continued his walking meditation, paying no more attention to the tiger. The tiger continued to sit there all this time like a watchdog, indifferent and unmoving.

Acharn Sitha later stopped his walking meditation and left the track for his resting place nearby. His resting place was only a small raised platform made of split pieces of bamboo. There he began his recitation, followed by sitting meditation, before resting for the night. He woke up at 3 o'clock in the morning and resumed his walking meditation on his track, but now the tiger was nowhere to be seen. He did not know where or when the tiger had gone, nor did he see it again in the nights that followed.

He later told this strange incident to Phra Acharn Mun, telling him that the tiger's roar had made his hair stand on end while his head felt numb, as if it had been stuffed inside a hat. He said he was not aware of any conscious fear at that time, but that possibly it was in the depths of his unconscious mind. After some moments he felt normal and continued his walking meditation in indifference. The following nights the tiger's intermittent roaring could still be heard nearby but it didn't pay him another visit. Acharn Sitha was completely indifferent to the roar and occupied himself comfortably in his exertion.

Phra Acharn Sitha was a little older than Phra Acharn Mun, and was his contemporary and colleague in the dhutanga practice of forest bhikkhus. He preferred to live only in seclusion and was one of those bhikkhus who was well-behaved and who had established himself on the Right Path. He preferred to dwell in the mountain regions of the kingdom of Laos rather than in Thailand, where he stayed for only a short time.

During the early stages of Phra Acharn Mun's dhutanga wanderings, he traveled through the towns of Nakhorn Phanom, Sakol Nakhorn and Udorn Thani to Burma and then back to Thailand through the town of Chiangmai in the north. He then went on to Laos to Luang Phrabang and Vientienne, and then again to Thailand at the town of Loey, where he spent a Rains Retreat at the village of Barn Khome near Phapu Cave. The following retreat he spent in the same town but at Pha Bueng Cave. In all these places there were mountains and forests teeming with beasts of all kinds. These regions were so sparsely populated that at times he traveled a whole day without even finding one village. In such wild and rugged terrain, anyone who lost his way was sure to be in real trouble since he would have to stay overnight there surrounded by wild beasts. He then went down to Bangkok, where he spent a Rains Retreat at Wat Pathumvan.

It was after this that he went up the Great Mountains (Khao Yai) area, where he stayed at Sarika Cave. On his trip to the Northeast he traveled alone except for a brief period when he was accompanied by some disciples.

His was a system of rigorous and resolute practice, without any tendencies towards associating with others. It had always been customary for him to stay and go anywhere and everywhere alone. It was not until he was confident of his inner strength that he took compassion on other bhikkhus and inclined towards teaching others. It was for this reason that he left the comfort of Sarika Cave and journeyed back to the Northeast. There was already a group of bhikkhu and samanera disciples who had been trained by him in the early period of his dhutanga wanderings there. When he returned to these places he was readily welcomed by all who had looked up to him as their Master.

Some of His Disciples

There was a great number of disciples who gathered around him, both bhikkhus and samaneras, laymen and laywomen. They were all dedicated to the dharma and willingly shouldered the rigorous and resolute practice which characterized his teaching. There were those who, in spite of their age and rank, being themselves respected as Acharns, willingly abandoned their former ranks, titles and activities and submitted themselves to his instruction and training. Quite a number of them were later well-established in the system of practice and the consequent inner development, being notably equipped with the ability to teach and train others in turn.

Those worth mentioning of this first group of disciples are the Venerable Phra Acharn Suwan, former abbot of Wat Aranyikavas in the town of Nong Khai; the Venerable Phra Acharn Singh Khantyagamo, abbot of Wat Salawan in the town of Nakhorn Rajasima, and the Venerable Phra Acharn Maha Pin Pannabalo, former abbot of Wat Saddharama in the town of Nakhorn Rajasima. These three Venerable Acharns were residents of the town of Ubol Rajadhani, and all three have passed away. Phra Acharn Singh and Phra Acharn Pin were brothers and both possessed a high level of academic knowledge. They were very much impressed by the teachings of the Venerable Acharn Mun and his manner of practice, and after having given up their former pride and ambitions, ranks, titles and responsibilities, they submitted themselves to his guidance. They both helped him considerably later on in the task of teaching and training people.

These three Acharns were important disciples who undertook to teach and train people, bhikkhus and laypeople alike, after their Master Phra Acharn Mun. A number of their disciples are still alive today.

Next came Phra Acharn Tet Desaransi with the ecclesiastical rank of Phra Nirodharansi. At present he resides in Wat Hin Mark Peng in the town of Nong Khai. He is one of the elderly disciples of Phra Acharn Mun and is highly revered by virtue of his blameless and impressive deportment, being well-known to bhikkhus and lay disciples alike in almost every part of the country. His mode of practice is smooth and regular, his character gentle and modest, his words enchanting, and his demeanor graceful. Such characteristics have endeared him to his disciples and will likewise endear those who imitate him to others around them.

It is worth noting that the characteristics and deportment of one particular Acharn cannot be expected to be similar to those of the rest. Those of one Acharn may be applicable and agreeable to all concerned, whereas those of another Acharn may be unique to himself only, and if imitated could be the cause of irritation and ill feeling to those involved.

Phra Acharn Tet's characteristics belong to the former category, being always pleasant and agreeable to everyone and also befitting for the status of a monk, who must be a model of gentleness and tranquility. The writer has venerated him as an Acharn to this day. He has a large number of disciples and has bestowed great benefit upon a great number of people. His is a model life, outstanding and exemplary.

Phra Acharn Fahn Acaro is the next in order of seniority. He now stays at Wat Udomsomporn in the village of Ban Na Hua Chang in the town of Sakol Nakhorn. He is well-known, as is Phra Acharn Tet, regarding his self-establishment on the Right Path and in Right Practice, and is also venerated by people in different parts of the country. His loving-kindness is impressive and limitless regarding both the material and inner help he has kindly rendered to the people.

Phra Acharn Kao is another Gem to be mentioned here. He stays at Wat Tham Klong Phane in the town of Udorn Thani. He is no less well-known as far as his mode of practice and insight are concerned. He always prefers seclusion and is exemplary in his rigorous and resolute way of practice, being regarded as a champion in his exertion in dhutanga observance. He is now eighty-two but still does not allow himself to be lax in exertion. There are those who feel concern about his health and who wonder why he should be continuing his efforts in that way since there is nothing more that he should struggle for. To those who offer such remarks he explains that "There is no negligence or laziness on the part of those who have no despot to tyrannize or rule over them. Unlike others they do not make a mountain out of a mole hill regarding the difficulties they encountered. It is this tendency to cower before hardships, real or imaginary that contributes to defeat and failure, with nothing to look back upon with justifiable pride. What is being filled to overflowing is poverty and troubles aggravated by worry and laziness. There is no such morbid exaggeration on the part of those who have rid their minds of these tyrants. Such a mind is pure dharma and always maintains itself in dignity and security. It is exemplary to all."

These are only a few of Phra Acharn Mun's disciples, each of whom is a Gem who does not fail to enrich and delight those who understand them. There are more disciples with lesser attainments. These disciples are the results of his teaching and training people, both bhikkhus and lay disciples, in the various places he reached during this dhutanga wanderings. Phra Acharn Mun's prophetic dream did come true. Many were the people who were greatly delighted and impressed in his way of teaching and his mode of practice. He taught what he himself had realized at first hand. There was no speculation involved. Whatever he spoke about, he 'knew'. Whatever he taught others to do, that he had already done himself. Thus he had fulfilled the wish he had made while staying at Sarika Cave to teach and train both his former disciples and his new ones.

The Dhutanga Observances

The following are the various dhutanga observances Phra Acharn Mun urged his disciples to follow:

1. **Going out for alms-food (pindapato).** This is the indispensable duty of dhutanga bhikkhus and samaneras, except on the days when they have made up their minds to fast. Self-control is to be continually exercised on their way to and from the village. This is simultaneously the practice of mindfulness and exertion. The mind must not be allowed to fall victim to tempting influences [there are, of course, plenty of them in a village:

women or girls who are careless in their manner of dressing]. These tempters can stealthily enter by way of a bhikkhu's eyes, ears, nose, palate, body and mind. Care must thus be taken both on the way to and from the village, every movement and gesture being guided by mindfulness. It is in fact another manifestation of exertion.

2. Refusing food offered later. Food put in the alms-bowl, be it little or much, is appropriate for those who intend to train themselves in contentment. There is no need to accept more which is offered later, that is, any food which is offered after a bhikkhu has returned from his alms-round in a village. Accepting such food would be surrendering to self-indulgence, a habit increasingly difficult to overcome. To be content with whatever food is put into the alms bowl is the purpose of this practice, whereas to covet more is the characteristics of a demon or a hungry ghost which is consumed by its own insatiable desire, struggling only to feed its mouth at the expense of its mind. This dhutanga observance serves to curb the insatiable greed for food and also to promote contentment as far as food is concerned.

3. Having one meal a day. This is most appropriate for a dhutanga bhikkhu who concentrates on mind-development and who must unload himself as much as possible from the burden of food. It automatically rids him of the expectation for more tasty food, which is but to feed and please the body and which impairs the dignity of one whose quest is the Cessation of Suffering. Sometimes it is even necessary to reduce the amount of food intake in that one meal so as to avoid overeating and the consequent sleepiness and sluggishness which invariably follow. This reduction is a boon to ordinary practice and is profitable to those who must be trained that way. This is another method by which to get rid of greed for food which is most undignified for a dhutanga bhikkhu.

In worldly matters there are devices for the removal of a harmful or antagonistic force, be it a dog, a snake, a tiger, an elephant, a disease or even a human being. In Buddhism, there is likewise, a method of eradication to be used by the dhutanga bhikkhu who is possessed by the detrimental force of coveting food. This observance is a means by which to counteract such an antagonistic force.

4. Eating food within an alms-bowl. A practice such as this is most suitable to a dhutanga bhikkhu who is always on the move, staying at any one place only temporarily. It relieves him of the burden of having to carry utensils which would be both awkward and cumbersome, weighing him down physically and spiritually. Another advantage to such a practice is that the mixing of food in the bowl stimulates mindfulness and wisdom to actively function in contemplating the nature of food [its repulsiveness] and the purpose of eating.

According to Phra Acharn Mun, a steadily deepening of truth was often realized by such contemplation and by the observance of this dhutanga and other observances. This was why he always strictly observed these practices himself. Eating food mixed within the alms-bowl is therefore an effective self-restraint from the desire to please the palate. While eating, contemplation is directed at the nature of the food [its repulsiveness], and to the purpose of eating, which is only to sustain life, not to be overcome by attachment or aversion to food which is either pleasing or not. This contemplation serves to make the mind balanced, irrespective of the food eaten.

5. Wearing rag-robos. Phra Acharn Mun, who always curbed himself against taking delight in what was pleasing to the eye, made this practice one of his regular observances. He tried to collect pieces of discarded cloth in such places as cemeteries

and sewed them up into a robe or into a piece of cloth which could be used for something else. He sometimes 'drew a robe'¹⁶ placed on a corpse in a cemetery when such a robe was deliberately offered to him by the owner of the corpse. While on his alms-round, going to and from a village, he made it a practice to pick up pieces of torn, discarded cloth on the side of the road, no matter what kind they were. He would later wash such pieces of cloth clean and use them for mending his robes or for something else. When his devotees afterwards learned of this practice, they would offer him robes by placing them in a cemetery which was on the way he would take on his alms-round, or around the area where he was dwelling. He later modified this practice to suit circumstances and he allowed himself to 'draw a robe' in a variety of localities. He kept this observance until the last day of his life.

Phra Acharn Mun often said that bhikkhus who hope for inward peace must regard themselves as worthless rags [in the eyes of worldly men]. With such an attitude of mind they will not be troubled in eating, sleeping and in association with others. They do not inflate themselves with feelings of self-importance or with vanity, knowing that what makes a recluse of a man is his capacity for deflating his own ego, not his capacity to extol himself. This is morality, or rather maturity, which is to be expected of a recluse. An aspirant must keep a wary eye on the intrusion of vanity and not allow it to encroach upon the domain of dharma, otherwise he would deteriorate and become more like an animal than a human being. To subjugate the "self" concept, treating it as though it were only pieces of rags and not allowing it to rear its head of vanity, is the criterion of progress in the dharma. Like the great wide earth, such a mind is unshakeable and unmoved by circumstances. Having been purged of all kinds and all degrees of vanity and egotism, it is able to maintain its balance on all occasions. The dhutanga practice of wearing rag-robes is a means by which to reduce and remove the concept of 'self'.

6. Staying in the wilds. From the early days of his practice, the Venerable Acharn realized the great merit of staying in the wild, by which he was blessed with peaceful seclusion. All around is the scenery which awakens heedfulness. While sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, mindfulness is always present with wisdom in contemplating the dharma, both internally and externally. This goes on continuously, except during sleep. Relief and buoyancy reign in every posture of the body. With no bondage or compulsion to weigh the mind down, the prospects for Deliverance appear increasingly brighter. The more desolate and distant the place is for human habitation, with wild beasts roaming freely about, the more prepared is the mind to soar up from the abyss of defilements, being at all times like a bird about to fly. The defilements are still there in the depths of the mind, but in such an environment the power of the mind is greatly developed and appears to have gotten rid of hundreds of defilements, with only few remaining. This is the influence of environment which gives encouragement to an aspirant at all times.

Thoughts towards the animals there are grounded in more compassion than in fear. Like human beings, they all share the universal sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death, but unlike man, they are incapable of realizing what is good and evil, what is meritorious and demeritorious. Thus a human being without such a realization would be no better than an animal. The term 'animal' is arbitrarily given by man and it is not known what name 'animals' give to man. If any, it could perhaps be 'demon' or 'ogre' to fit the description which is based on the usual practice of indiscriminate killing, both for food

¹⁶ 'To draw a robe' here is the literal translation of the Thai idiom, which means to accept that robe by pulling or drawing it from where it was placed or hung, be in on a corpse, a branch of a tree or a refuse-heap. This is to be differentiated from accepting such a robe from the hands of a donor, and this kind of robe is called in Pali pansukulo, literally 'rag-robes'.

and for fun. In fact such an appellation is to a great extent befitting and reasonable since it is evident how many beings who call themselves 'human' are so unforgiving both to animals and to other human beings, who often take to violence and killing, feeding the fires of danger and fear in both the society of men and that of animals. It is because of this that animals are instinctively suspicious of men.

There seems to be an inexplicable bond of friendship between a dhuthanga bhikku and the animals, even those beasts which are wild and which are supposed to be feared. One time according to the Venerable Acharn, while he was engaged in walking meditation, he was confronted with a wild boar which happened to pass that way. Instead of being frightened and running away, the boar seemed to pay little attention to him and wandered about the area indifferently. Perhaps it was able to know that the Venerable Acharn was not an ogre after all.

Here the writer would like to insert a similar account which happened in the Bard Tard Forest Hermitage in its early days when the area was newly constructed to make way in some places for bhikkhus' shelters.

There were already several bhikkhus and samaneras living in the hermitage at that time but a band of wild boars could still be seen wandering around the bhikkhus' shelters, even sleeping there in indifference right in front of those shelters. They roamed around fearlessly just a few meters away from the tracks for walking meditation, being so close that they could be heard rooting around. At first some of the bhikkhus were puzzled by this and called their friends to come and see for themselves, but still the boars were unmoved, and before long, neither the boars nor the bhikkhus paid any attention to each other, there being peace and comfort for all.

Such incidents are rarely met with now since many 'ogres' have violated the law of live and let live and have slaughtered the boars whenever possible [possibly when the bhikkhus were away temporarily, or when the boars strayed into any of the nearby villages], and in a short time will never be met with again. This confirms the fact that animals prefer to seek refuge where bhikkhus dwell, even those in towns. Dogs, for example, are often seen in hundreds in monasteries. They seemed to know that they will not be harmed there [at least not by the bhikkhus, at any rate, although a temple boy or two may vent his spleen on these creatures]. This shows how the dharma always produces peace and harmlessness to all concerned, animals as well as human beings.

According to Venerable Acharn, staying in the wilds provides endless opportunities for contemplation of both external things and inner development. The mind is always bent on Deliverance and persistently exerts itself to attain to that Goal. This is the battleground for an aspirant to the Cessation of Suffering in accordance with the preliminary instruction given by the Preceptor to a new bhikkhu during his ordination ceremony.¹⁷

The Venerable Acharn strictly observed this practice of staying in the wilds most of the time, except when he was bound to stay elsewhere [such as in a town for a brief period]. Staying in the wilds or forest areas one is constantly reminded of isolation and seclusion. There is little opportunity for self-complacency to insert itself. For an aspirant to the Cessation of Suffering, this is the well-spring of all virtues.

¹⁷ See supplementary notes.

7. **Staying under the shade of a tree.** Like staying in the wilds, staying under the shade of a tree can offer many advantages. According to the Venerable Acharn, when his mind was delivered from all the Fetters of the World, it was during the night when he was seated under the branches of a lonely tree. This event will be related below. The writer begs the forgiveness of the readers in putting off this important account for the moment.

The development of mindfulness is an advantage to be gained from staying under the branches of a tree, where there is no enclosure nor any kind of protection to be expected. With mindfulness constantly being developed, the eradication of defilements is strengthened. The bases of mindfulness – body, sensation, conditions of mind, and the phenomenon – are excellent themes for safeguarding the aspirant and for the eradication of his defilements. The mind that is fixed upon the bases of mindfulness or the Noble Truths through the influence of seclusion or danger is one with the protective armor and defensive weapon in the noble battle for the sake of Deliverance. It is advisable therefore that an aspirant wishing to speed up his efforts should seek the shelter of a tree, which can greatly promote his advancement in the dharma.

8. **Staying in a cemetery** (the internal and external cemetery). A practice such as this is an excellent way of warning an aspirant against heedlessness or self-complacency. Most people pretend to avoid thinking of death forgetting the fact that they are every moment in the process of dying. Just think how many people who had once been alive have been removed to various cemeteries! Those bodies which crowd the funeral pyres or which are in their graves had one time been living people undergoing the irresistible process of dying, like ourselves. How, then, can we living people be exempted from this natural phenomena? A visit to one's friends or relatives in a cemetery can therefore serve two functions: firstly, it reminds us of the deceased, and, secondly, with such a reminder we shall bring ourselves to compare ourselves with them and then realize the phenomena we are moving towards without any power of resistance.

A bhikkhu is a living symbol of the noble struggle for Deliverance. It is necessary that he study the Cycle of Births and Deaths, both external and internal. Externally he can refer to the places where corpses are buried, burnt or thrown to animals, whereas internally he is advised to contemplate his own body, which is composed of an uncountable number of animals stuffed in it each day. Such contemplation, when properly guided by wisdom, can lead to *sanvega* (see note 12) and insight. Thus an aspirant, to be bhikkhu or a lay disciple, who prefers to visit cemeteries, both external and internal, with the recollection of death as life, youth, social status, ranks, titles, etc. Such a one is not overcome by vanity or self-importance, being inclined to see his own faults and to correct them rather than to seek for those of others and to point them out with malicious intent. The latter is the habitual accumulation on the part of most people, which is but increasing the stock of one's own evil. Unfortunately, it is an epidemic most difficult to combat but easiest to breed.

The cemetery is the biggest meeting place of peoples, regardless of age, caste, rank or nationality. There is no means of crossing over it, except by the way the Buddha and his Noble Disciples have crossed. But this crossing is not without thorough study in the great institution of birth, old age, illness and death. There is no hope of escape for those who choose ostrich-like to forget these truths, for such truths are there, belonging to them all the time. Staying in a cemetery is training oneself to face the truth and to be encouraged by it. Absurd as this may seem to worldly minds, it has been done, and with results, in the circle of practicing Buddhists who base their faith in the Buddha and his

other Noble Disciples. This dhutanga was therefore recommended by the Buddha as a means of reducing pride in life and self-complacency, and as a means of preparing ourselves for the moment of death before it is too late. With the last breath, all protective measures come to no avail. The great institution of death is reached. The only thing left to be done is to burn what remains. No observance of precepts, charity or meditation or any other way of merit-making can be begun or continued.

The Venerable Acharn was known always to have recommended visits to a cemetery, both internal and external, because of these benefits. Of his disciples, there were those who, despite their habitual fear, struggled to courageously follow this dhutanga observance.

A Story of a Bhikkhu Who Was Afraid of Ghosts

(The following story was told by the Venerable Acharn himself)

This story is told here to show how great was this bhikkhu's fear at first and how courageous he became at last. It can be a lesson to those who find themselves in the same situation.

A bhikkhu on his dhutanga wanderings once stopped for the night in a forested area. He arrived there at dusk, and being a stranger to that area, asked the villagers where it would be suitable for him to stay. He was taken to a place, but was not told that it was next to a cemetery. The first night there he rested peacefully, but on the following day he saw the villagers pass by carrying a corpse, which they later cremated on a pyre only a few meters away, evidently within sight of where he was. The moment he saw the coffin being carried along, he began to feel uneasy but managed to comfort himself by telling himself that the cremation pyre was certainly some distance away. When he subsequently discovered that the pyre was only a short distance away from where he was sitting and that the burning of the remains was taking place right before his eyes, he was doubly afraid – the fear he was experiencing at that moment and fear of the coming night. By the time night fell, his fear had grown to unbelievable proportions, so much so that he was almost unable to breathe and looked as though he were going to die.

After the villagers had left he was constantly tormented by his own fear, Neither the recitation of passages concerned with death nor meditation could come to his rescue. Whenever he closed his eyes, there appeared before him a long line of ghosts coming to pay him a visit. Their number seemed to be endless, new faces always entering into his vision giving him no time to breathe, It was the most horrible thing which had happened to him since his ordination.

After several hours of being visited by these ghosts, he began to wonder if all these ghosts parading around in his head weren't just figments of his own morbid imagination. He reminded himself that a dhutanga bhikkhu is generally recognized as being fearless, as being able to face death, ghosts, any dangers whatever: He was one such bhikkhu! How could he himself be so shamelessly afraid of ghosts like that? If he succumbed any more to this haunting fear, he would be a disgrace to the name of dhutanga bhikkhu.

Thus encouraging himself in the struggle, he decided to go to where it was that his fear was born and to face whatever it was there. Putting on his robes, he started towards the

funeral pyre on which the corpse could still be seen burning in the flickering light of the fire. After only a few steps, however, he couldn't move. It was as if his feet had suddenly been nailed to the earth. His heart beat thunderously and his body perspired as if the hot noonday sun were beating down on him, Knowing that he needed more strength he forced himself to walk on. He quickened his pace lest he should falter and stop again. He knew that he needed more self-control to fight against his trembling body and mind, to fight off the mesmerizing thought that his end was near. Through sheer strength of will he managed to drag his unwilling body to the pyre and thought to himself "Whatever is going to happen, let it happen", but his victory was not yet.

He was breathing laboriously because of his efforts and showed signs of fainting. He managed to get himself to look at the corpse which was partly burnt up, but on seeing the skull burned white through long exposure to the fire he felt he would collapse right then and there. He fought down his fear and took a seat in front of the corpse only a few feet away, and facing it, made it the theme of his meditation. He forced his throbbing mind to recite the passages concerned with death: "I am destined to die, like this corpse. Why should I fear it? I am going to die sooner or later. What's the use of this fear? I must die and be like this corpse. Why fear it? Don't be afraid of it!"

The Wonder Dog

While he was thus reciting these passages, struggling with his fear of the ghosts, he heard a strange sound behind him! Footsteps! Someone was walking towards him! The footfalls were not regular, being silent for a while, and then starting again. Someone was preparing to attack him from behind! He was so completely seized by fear and his breathing became so violent that he was within a hairsbreadth of jumping up and running, wildly shouting, "Ghost! Help!" He managed to get a grip on himself and forced himself to stay seated and to wait to see what 'it' would do next. He could hear 'it' tiptoeing nearer until it was only a few meters away, and then suddenly he heard sounds of someone or something eating something crispy! "When 'it' has finished its crispy meal, it will surely come and make an equally crispy meal of me. So this is my end," he thought to himself.

He could no longer restrain himself, and preparing himself to get up and run, he opened his eyes to see what 'it' was, thinking, "There might be a way of escape to come back and fight this thing another day. That would be better than surrendering myself tonight!"

What he saw before him when he opened his eyes was indeed a surprise, one that made him laugh heartily at his own folly and cowardice. There getting ready to attack and devour him was nothing but a village dog sniffing around for food which the villagers had left as offerings to the spirits! It wasn't paying attention to anyone, not even to the frightened bhikkhu. It was only interested in finding anything edible left lying on the ground.

"So it is you who have frightened me all this time," the bhikkhu thought, feeling pity for himself and thinking how cowardly he was despite his resolution to face whatever came his way. Had he not been able to check his fear at the last moment by means of the dharma of self-control, that fear would very nearly have driven him mad.

"What I have just done is a shameful thing for one who dons the kasaya robe [a yellowish-brown robe, dyed in the extract of the jack-fruit tree] of the Tathagata [one of

the Buddha's epithets], the All-conquering One. To think that I have wasted the people's alms-food because of this foolish fear. And what if there are many more bhikkhus like myself? What a disgrace I am to the name of Buddhism!"

The Great Magician

With these thoughts still fresh in his mind, that bhikkhu made up his mind not to leave that place until he was able to conquer his fear or perish in the attempt. He came to realize that a bhikkhu with such fear is a bad example to all. From that time on he courageously handled his own fear by staying in that cemetery day and night, comparing the lifeless corpses there with the 'living' corpse of his own body, contemplating the ingredients and elements which combine to form those bodies and his own. Without mind, a living corpse becomes a lifeless one, the various elements dissolving and going back to where they came from.

Another valuable lesson was that the dog had unwittingly terrorized him nearly to death. It was his mind which was actively at work, creating something, in fact many things, out of nothing which had hurt only itself. This reveals the truth of how a person's imagination is a magician and can play pranks on the mind that gives it birth.

"My imagination nearly caused my death because of fright," he thought. "It's time that I now took control of this imagination of mine. This magician must be cremated just as that corpse has been cremated on that pyre." And he did keep his resolution. Whenever fear occurred, he fearlessly tackled it. Wherever his fear was directed, it was there that he fearlessly went. That night, without sleep, he came to grips with his fear. The following nights with the same resoluteness, he fought with his fear and finally succeeded in 'cremating' it.

This story is true; it shows how a bhikkhu struggled fearlessly to rid himself of his own fear. He finally, managed to overcome it where he was first overcome by it. Such is the benefit of staying in a cemetery.

9. Wearing three robes. Phra Acharn Mun observed this dhutanga practice since the day of his ordination. It was only in old age, when his body was gradually enfeebled and needed more warmth and protection that he allowed himself the leniency of more robes. In this time, dhutanga bhikkhus preferred to wander about except during the Rains Retreat, staying in the wilds. Most of the time they traveled on foot since there was no other means of transport as is available today. Each had to carry whatever belongings he had himself. No one could help the other. Weight and size had then to be seriously reckoned with since it would be more of a hindrance than a help if things other than what was absolutely necessary were accepted. After some time a dhutanga bhikkhu became used to traveling light and preferred to give away the extra robes or other things offered to him. To those with this manner of living, keeping or carrying extra things would obviously be burdensome. This is also in accordance with the practice characteristics of a recluse whose life must be marked by poverty and purity. He will be all the more revered if, when he dies, he leaves nothing other than the bhikkhu's requisites. While still living he is glorified by holy poverty. After the dissolution of the body, he is Well-gone, his mind having been detached from all his belongings. It is this kind of death in the midst of poverty and purity that is always admired by virtuous gods and men. Such a dhutanga practice serves to glorify the life of a recluse.

Phra Acharn Mun observed these dhutanga practices and was hardly equaled in his time, nor can he be equaled in this present time. He also regularly instructed his bhikkhu disciples to be heedful of these dhutanga practices and to observe them with diligence and respect. Under his guidance they were led to stay under trees, in forests, on mountains, in caves, under precipices, or in cemeteries, all of which for the ordinary person were wild and fearful places. They were also led into the villages on morning alms-round for alms-food and refused whatever was offered afterwards. When this was later known to the devotees, they complied with this practice and put into the alms-bowl whatever was intended for him and his bhikkhu disciples. His disciples were trained to eat within their alms-bowl, not troubling themselves with other containers. Whatever was eaten was mixed together in the alms-bowl. Eating was limited to once a day. This he did until the last day of his life.

The Nectar of His Sermons

His band of followers, both bhikkhus, samaneras and lay disciples, grew steadily larger, always a great number gathering wherever he stayed for the sake of his teaching. There were sometimes sixty or seventy bhikkhus and samaneras in the place where he was staying, not including the many others who had gathered some distance away. He would tell them to find individual places, each to be separated from the rest, but within calling distance or walking distance so that they might be able to come to him if they had questions or for his instructions.

On the day of the Patimokkha recitation [the fortnightly recitation of the Code of Monastic Discipline], all the bhikkhus would assemble together where the Venerable Acharn was staying. After the Patimokkha was finished, he would instruct the assembled bhikkhus and answer the questions which were put to him by them. They would then return to their shelters and continue their efforts to eradicate defilements, strengthened by delight in the dharma of his instructions. These bhikkhus concentrated their efforts in the practice of morality, meditation, and wisdom with their other affiliated duties, with the results obtained being in proportion to their development and maturity.

Although there were sometimes many bhikkhus and samaneras under his guidance in one place yet there appeared to be no administration problem whatsoever, for those who came to see him had come with the similar purpose of training themselves under his system of practice. And even though there would be many bhikkhus and samaneras staying in the area where the Venerable Acharn was dwelling, yet a visitor would be surprised to find almost no one about the place if they happened to go there at a time when the bhikkhus were not assembled for some purpose, such as mealtime or the instruction hour. Except at these times, all would be engaged day and night in walking or sitting meditation at their respective places of retreat.

During the instruction hour, only the Venerable Acharns's voice would be heard, the other bhikkhus and samaneras assembled there, no matter how many, sitting in complete silence. His voice, and the dharma he explained were impressive and delightful, so much so that all his listeners would be spellbound – time seemed to come to a standstill. There would be no bodily fatigue or stiffness felt. The mind of each listener was in complete union with the dharma, insatiably drinking of its nectar.

Each meeting for instruction lasted several hours and was regarded as a practical lesson for the development of both meditation and wisdom. It is because of this that dhutangg bhikkhus pay special respect and reverence towards their meditation master, always

taking delight in listening to his sermons. To these bhikkhus, their meditation master is their life, and even more than that. That the Venerable Ananda was willing to sacrifice his life for the Buddha when a drunken elephant was turned loose by Devadatta was also due to this same wholehearted veneration.

The extent of the dhutanga bhikkhus' complete confidence in Phra Acharn Mun may be seen in how an order given by him was obeyed. Whenever he told any of them to go and stay in a particular cave or forest area, they readily and willingly obeyed him, no matter how dangerous that place was known by all to be. Instead of being afraid of death, they were glad to have been encouraged by his confidence in them, being certain that his order was an indirect prediction of their achievement. This was something like the Buddha's prediction regarding the full-final Attainment of the Venerable Ananda, indicating that that would occur on the day of the General Council of the Sangha. Complete confidence in one's meditation master is therefore of great importance to an aspirant since it strengthens his power of concentration and enhances his progress, thus saving time and effort both on his part and that of this meditation master. Such confidence eliminates the need for repeated instructions that exhaust both instructor and the instructed.

His Second Journey to the Northeast – How to Conquer Fear

On the occasion of his second journey to the Northeast, a great many people had been stimulated by and become enthusiastic in his instructions and system of practice. He traveled through most towns, teaching and encouraging the people wherever he stopped or stayed. He traveled back and forth between Nakhorn Rajasima, Srisaket, Ubol Rajathani, Nakhorn Phanom, Sakol Nakhorn, Udorn Thani, Nong Khai, Loey, Lomsak and Phetchaboon in Thailand, and Vientienne and Tah Khak in the kingdom of Laos several times. In these areas and the areas south and southwest of the town of Sakol Nakhorn there were vast forests and great mountains, and it was here he preferred to stay longest for the purpose of eradicating defilements. One place where he spent a Rains Retreat, the village of Pone Sawang in Sawang Dandin, is mountainous and wild as is frequented by dhutanga bhikkhus to this day.

In the dry season, those dhutanga bhikkhus who loved the wilds and seclusion, could be seen wandering about in these parts. Their beds, if any, were small raised platforms made of pieces of split bamboo. This kind of bed is usually about two meters long, one or one and a half meters wide, and raised about fifty centimeters above the ground. Such a bed is intended to be used by one person only. Each raised platform would be about thirty to forty meters away from the next one, depending on the size of the area provided for them at each locality. In a wider area these platforms would be much further apart. The smaller the number of bhikkhus in a given area, the greater would be the distance between them so that only the occasional cough or sneeze could be heard by the others. The trees and bushes between each platform were left as they were so that a bhikkhu staying in one place would not be able to see the bhikkhu staying in the place nearest him. Tracks for walking meditation were cleared by lay devotees, one track for each bhikkhu, each track being anywhere from ten to twenty meters long. These tracks would be used by the bhikkhus both day and night.

If there was any bhikkhu who was afraid of ghosts or tigers, the Venerable Acharn would put him on the perimeter of that area, farthest away from the other bhikkhus. He would do this in order to train that bhikkhu to handle his own fear. Such a bhikkhu had to be

made to know that it was his own anticipation and imagination which produced things which were not really there. Once such a bhikkhu was able to overcome his wild anticipation of danger and suffering, he would be relieved of an oppressive burden, no longer having to carry fear with him wherever he went. According to the Venerable Acharn, the method of facing and fighting fear is more profitable than that of fleeing it, which is but perpetual self-enslavement.

How a Dhutanga Bhikkhu Braves Suffering

If there weren't any raised platforms, dhutanga bhikkhus would have to sleep on the ground on a bed of dried or fresh leaves, or straw, if materials such as these were available. During the first and second lunar months [December and January] the climate was rather uncomfortable, being the period when the rains were about to end. Each downpour was sure to drench each bhikkhu to the skin. If it rained all night, no one slept. The klod [dhutanga bhikkhu's umbrella] offered no protection from the inclement weather when the ravages of the storms were added to the pelting rain. Every bhikkhu had to sit in the dark within his klod, trembling with cold, being more like a destitute blind man. The situation would be a little better during the day, for then the bhikkhus would be able to look around and gather something to construct a makeshift shelter against the rain.

The bhikkhu's outer robe and matches had to be kept carefully within the alms-bowl, the lid tightly shut. His upper robe would be used as a blanket or rain-cloth during the rain. The mosquito-net hung over the klod would be let down to keep the rain from blowing in, but when it rained at night or even all night, his robe would not be dry in the morning. That meant more difficulties when it came time to go into the village for alms-food.

During the next three months [February, March, and April] it would begin to get warmer. These bhikkhus now sought the higher altitudes, seeking shelter in caves or under precipices. During the earlier months, these places would have been wet and filled with moisture. If they had taken shelter there then, it would have meant fever or malaria, a chronic and debilitating disease, for which at that time there was no effective cure. Once anyone contracted it, it had to be endured until it went of its own accord. The writer had also been afflicted with malaria, and, like many others, had to live with it until it disappeared. Malaria attacked all the dhutanga bhikkhus in that region, from the Venerable Acharn himself down to every one of his disciples, even killing some of them.

Accounts of these painful trials serve to reveal how the Venerable Acharn and his disciples courageously underwent much privation and suffering in their noble struggle for Deliverance. It was not until they had braved death and survived that they undertook to teach others, revealing to people through their firsthand experience the right way of belief and practice.

Where Ghosts and Spirits Reigned Supreme

It is not an exaggeration to say that before the time of Phra Acharn Sao and Phra Acharn Mun, the Northeastern region was predominantly ruled over by ghosts, spirits and demons. People beginning work on a farm or in a garden, anyone building a house or anything else – all having to consult a sorcerer or a soothsayer for the auspicious

moment, day, month or year. They were then required to make offerings to propitiate the spirits before beginning their work or whatever it was they planned to do. Otherwise whatever mishap occurred, however trivial or insignificant, was always attributed to the wrath of these ghosts and demons. Even coughs or sneezes, so commonplace even among dogs, were again regarded as the spirits' work! No function of the body was independent of the control of some demon and the sorcerers at that time were surprisingly all-knowing and all-powerful. They always managed to find that the people had angered the spirits and ghosts in doing such-and-such, and so to alleviate such wrong doing on their part, they would be required to propitiate the spirits by making offerings. They would be told that after such a propitiation was made, their cold, cough, sneeze, or whatever, would be cured. And this despite the fact that the symptoms of the disease would still be there! The people thought that "as the spirits' man has spoken, so it shall be done." And they would feel relieved through auto-suggestion, which was effectively applied by both patients and physicians alike through the so-called spirits' power. Medicines were of little importance in these cases.

After both Acharns had instructed and awakened them to the truth of Buddhism, these superstitious beliefs and mystic rites gradually lost their hold over the people's minds. Many a spirits' man was convinced of the truth and came to accept the Triple Gem, instead of ghosts and spirits, as their Refuge. This is the heritage both Venerable Acharn bequeathed to the people of the Northeast, and, in most parts, is still preserved today. A person wandering in that region today will hardly ever tread on the oblations offered to the spirits, which would have been found to have been scattered profusely in days gone by. In this respect, the Northeast may be said to have been liberated from the spirits' yoke through the kind instruction of both the Venerable Acharns. The grateful people of the Northeast will remember this precious and noble heritage for a long time to come.

Answering Questioners Rather Than Questions Themselves

With inner development always his main concern, Phra Acharn Mun always dedicated himself to instructing the people, lay disciples as well as bhikkhus and samaneras. In a sense, his aim was to make a 'human being' out of a man. In his wanderings into villages he often encountered the village wise men who would approach him for the sake of debate and to question him. Some of the popular topics often discussed concerned the existence of ghosts and spirits; the birthplace of men; the cause of love between a man and a woman, and male and female animals; and what school educated man and animals in the affairs of love. The Venerable Acharn's answers to such questions, as far as the writer can remember them, will be quoted briefly here.

Are there ghosts or spirits? In response to this question, the Venerable Acharn said, "Whatever exists, exists by itself, be it a ghost, spirit or any other thing. Such a thing exists independent of a person's belief or disbelief, which cannot change matters. The causes of one's fear and suffering of ghosts exists in one's own worry and imagination. The mind that doesn't 'reach out' for such fearful stories is obviously not troubled by fear. Fear such as this is therefore produced more often than not by one's own imagination, not by real ghosts."

Do ghosts exist as real entities? "Even though there are really such things as ghosts, there is as yet no irrefutable evidence of their existence which will convince the skeptics, because most people cannot bring themselves to admit the truth. The thief who is

arrested with stolen property in his possession, for example, will rarely confess his guilt. Even when he is confronted with witnesses and is therefore bound to admit his guilt, he will still try to justify himself in some other way. Asked during imprisonment what crime he had committed and he will most often say he was accused of stealing. In other words he will still not admit his guilt. Such is the tendency of most people.¹⁸

From where was man born? The Venerable Acharn answered his questioner rather emphatically saying that man was born of his parents, that he didn't "come out of a tree's hole" [a Thai saying meaning that life comes from living things]. He also said that questions such as this should not be asked.

If one speaks in accordance with reality, man is born of ignorance [avijja - ignorance and tanha - desire, referring to the Law of Dependent Origination], but an answer such as this would have been of no use to the questioners since how many of them would have been willing to learn about it and then to make the effort necessary to reduce that ignorance and desire! It is evident that the questioners wished to test him rather than to know about the truth. However, it should be noted that the cause of each person's birth is in his own mind which is overcome by what are collectively called defilements [kilesa]. If we break these defilements down they in a sense can be called ignorance, desire, etc., as found in the enumeration as given in the Law of Dependent Origination - through ignorance arises the karma-formations, etc.; through the cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of the karma-formations, etc.¹⁹ Looking at one's own mind will enable one to know where man is born and what is the cause of suffering and troubles in this world. There is no need to ask anyone else, nor is there any need to seek the answer elsewhere. It is thoughts and attentions directed outwards which blind a person to his own nature, affairs, and, most importantly, to his defilements. Such a mind is untamed and untrained, obsessed by its own vanity and obstinacy.

Why, even without conventional education, do men and women come to love each other? The Venerable Acharn's answer, to this question was direct and bold:

"Lustful desire does not exist in any book, nor does it take its birth in any school, and never has it to be taught by any teacher! Lust exists in the minds of men and women who [think they] are in love, and also in the minds of animals which [we presume] are in 'love'. Lust makes the people and animals in its power shameless, irrespective of age, caste, race, or nationality. Without any attempt to check or restrain it, society would soon collapse since minds would be overflowing with its tyrannical influence. Much of the world's untold suffering has been caused by this defilement being unduly encouraged and made a god of. A mind overflowing with lust [disguised as love] produces suffering to itself and others more extensively than a river overflowing its banks can cause a public

¹⁸ This answer is obviously quite evasive, but in answering questions, the Venerable Acharn followed that method used by the Buddha and his Noble Disciples. Any question can be answered in a variety of ways, depending on the time, the place, and, most importantly, the questioner himself. The Venerable Acharn used the technique of answering the questioner himself, rather than the question asked. If we look at the case at hand, it is obvious how the people at that time were obsessed by belief in the power of ghosts and spirits. Any blunt, detailed answer to the fact that there are any such entities would have aggravated the situation which he hoped to improve. On the other hand to deny their existence would have been a falsehood. He wisely pointed out important facts behind the existence of ghosts and spirits (imagination, etc) and avoided answering the question directly. Elsewhere he made it clear (when no question was put to him concerning it) that there really exist invisible beings on other planes of existence, be they called ghosts, demons, god, angels, or whatever.

¹⁹ See supplementary notes.

disaster. What is more important, the internal flood inundates the mind throughout the year, knowing no dry season whatsoever. Lust is the cause of [what we suppose to be] the love between a man and a woman”.

“It is through the dictates of lust that men and women are led to love and take delight in each other. But the guile of lust is subtle. Working one way it produces love; working in another way it breeds anger, hatred, and other destructive thoughts and moods. At one time it brings a man and a woman together in what seems to be an immortal love; at another time it pulls them apart, setting one against the other until they cannot bear the sight of each other”.

“Haven't you ever experienced this dual aspect of your 'love'?” he asked his questioners.

“Yes, we have,” they admitted. “To tell you in all honesty, we are fed up with quarrelling amongst ourselves, but we just can't seem to help it. It just seems to happen.”

“Have you really, in all honesty, tried to help yourselves? Such a way of life is destructive not only to yourselves, but also to your children who are innocent of your bickering and brawling. When you are influenced by anger and hatred, you must remind yourselves of the time when you experienced love. The result will be an overall view of the two-sided coin of love and hate. In most cases, each of you appears to be a despot or a perfectionist, forgetting what is possible and what is not. This attitude of mind may be compared to 'damming the waters of the ocean with one's hands', and is sure to result in bitter disappointment and depression - a just reward for an impossible desire. This principle should be extended to other members of the household or to friends and other people as well. If there are those, however, who will not admit this truth and who persist in their desire for the impossible, then it is their own fault and evil. Whoever admits the truth is blessed by it” [that is, by his own ability to admit it].

Such was the Venerable Acharn's instruction regarding love.

Meditation Visions to be Scrutinized

Whenever the gathering of bhikkhus and lay disciples became too large in one place, the Venerable Acharn would allot a particular time for giving instructions to each group. Lay devotees would be asked to come from four to five o'clock in the afternoon, whereas the evenings [from seven onwards] would be set aside for bhikkhus and samaneras. After the meeting, the bhikkhus and samaneras would return to their shelters and continue their effort in mind-training.

It should be noted that this was his arrangement for the instruction of bhikkhus and lay devotees during his first and second stay in the Northeast. During his third stay in the Northeast, when after he returned from Chiangmai in the North and was then staying in Udorn Thani however, his methods for dealing with bhikkhus and lay devotees were widely different. This will be dealt with below.

Special attention was paid to the instructing of bhikkhus and samaneras. Whenever there were those who had evolved a particular intuition, whether regarding inner development or external environment, the Venerable Acharn would give them special, individual attention and would call them up to his residence for a personal checkup

under his scrutinizing eye. Each aspirant had his own tendencies and aptitudes; hence the consequent results. What was common to all, however, was blissful peace. There were some who were involved in external happenings, such as the seeing of ghosts and demons approaching, the visitation of gods or devas, the appearing of carcasses or corpses before them, their own bodies lying there lifeless, and so forth.

For those inexperienced aspirants who had just attained to this degree of inward peace, it would have been impossible for them to deal properly with each of these visions. Moreover, none of them would have been in the position to have known which of them was false or imaginary or which of them was an actual occurrence. When an aspirant lacks self-scrutiny or the ability to distinguish between these visions, he falls victim to self-hypnosis, taking as true or real whatever visions he has.

This is seriously detrimental to his progress. In fact, the number of aspirants who will have experiences such as these are few, perhaps about five percent. But for those who have them, it is of the utmost importance that they be under the guidance and supervision of a competent teacher. Otherwise, they will lose their way and go astray.

Listening to dhutanga bhikkhus giving an account of their visions to the Venerable Acharn was exciting, but even more so was his instruction to them in return. Each answer was in detail and based on reason, him telling them how to deal properly with each vision in a particular case.

There are different kinds of visions and there are correspondingly different ways to deal with them. The disciples who encountered visions were in the end more than satisfied. They were delighted by his explanations and, at the same time, steadily encouraged in their practice. It was no less encouraging when those who had had no such visions described to the Venerable Acharn how they followed their practice and were blessed with inward peace and joy. Listening to these various experiences being related to the Venerable Acharn was a source of joy and spiritual strength to those who were similarly making effort towards the same Goal.

There were those who, through the retreat of the mind [into the upacara level of samadhi] had toured the celestial realms for hours. There were again others who had journeyed to the dark, miserable realms and who took pity on beings there experiencing the fruits of their own karma. There were still others who were able to visit both kinds of invisible planes and then saw the vast differences between the conditions of life there. Some were able to experience visitations by gods and angels as well as calls from ghosts and demons. Others enjoyed blissful peace due to one-pointedness of mind, depending on the degree of concentration or quietude attained. Others concentrated on the function of wisdom, analyzing and dissolving such experiences to their original condition. Some of those who were beginners progressed unsteadily like tottering children, one moment rising and another moment falling again. There were also some, who, having listened to others discussing their experiences with the Venerable Acharn, wept for joy, seeing that those experiences were similar to their own. And there were still others who behaved themselves like a ladle in a pot of soup or curry, knowing nothing of the taste and becoming a discredit to their teacher. In a society where people come together, such variety in its members is to be expected. He is wise, who knows how to choose the profitable and abandon the detrimental.

Freedom of Mind and Body-Bliss and Peace of a Dhutanga Bhikkhu

The Venerable Acharn remained in the Northeast for several years on his second trip there, each year changing the locality for spending the Rains Retreat. After the three months' period of the Rains Retreat, he would set out on his dhutanga wanderings in the wilds once again, being detached from all persons and things, being like a bird having taken to the air and being burdened by no other weight except that of its own body and feathers. For any tree it perches on or any marsh or pond it feeds in there is no attachment whatsoever. There is no grasping after them with thoughts of this is 'my' tree or that is 'my' pond. A dhutanga bhikkhu, living like a bird in this manner, is free and buoyant like a bird. It is true that for most people this kind of bliss and buoyancy is difficult to understand because such a life style is, for an ordinary man, difficult to follow, man being as he is a gregarious creature. He prefers association, coming together and settling down in one place.

Not all can be expected to do as the Venerable Acharn has done regarding his strict and energetic life as a dhutanga bhikkhu. For an ordinary man to try to do such as he did would be like driving a land animal to live in the water. When the mind is attuned to the dharma, however, its attitudes are reversed. Isolation and seclusion are real blessings. A person with such a mind prefers staying alone, wandering alone, doing things alone. His is a 'lone mind'-free of troubles and disturbances, but all the time absorbed in the bliss of dharma. Thus, a person who is blessed with oneness of mind, a mind established only in dharma, is also blessed with a mind which is unclouded, radiant, and peaceful. He has only his body; he has no other burdens. And he has his mind which is freed from distractions. The source of bliss for a mind such as this is inexhaustible and unchangeable, not limited by time or space. It has transcended all suppositions and fallacies. Such a way of life was the life of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun, who always dwelt in blissful peace whether sitting, standing, walking, lying down or leading his band of disciples, both bhikkhus and lay devotees. A number of those disciples of his have also established themselves in advanced practice and insight, and, like him, have selflessly shouldered the task of instructing others in turn until now.

At times, while on his way to a village on the morning round for alms-food he would mention animals seen on the way and make them the theme of his instruction, telling his disciples how those animals were experiencing the results of their karma. He said that they should not be treated with contempt just because they were animals since they were suffering the particular results of karma at a particular time. A parallel may be seen in the lives of men, where the results of both good and evil karma are constantly ripening at different times. Thus hens, dogs, cows and buffaloes were often the themes of his instructions. It is possible that this was partly due to his compassion for those animals, partly due to the fact that we who are now human beings have also passed through such a state at one time or another, and also partly to the causes of all these fluctuating but far-reaching changes within our own minds. They lurk insidiously and work stealthily. Without properly dealing with them, without the right way of removing them on our part, the lurking danger is there within our own minds and there is no end to these fluctuations, nor can security from their insidious influences be expected. This was how on-the-way themes of instruction could be helpful to those who knew how to make a lesson of them.

Manner of Respect on the Part of Angels - Mind-to-Mind Communication

During his stay in some of the Northeastern, towns, the Venerable Acharn knew that there were at times terrestrial angels listening to the instructions he was giving to his disciples late at night. Both the terrestrial and celestial angels had a profound reverence for him. These celestial angels whenever they would come down to listen to his sermons late at night, would not come passing the bhikkhus' shelters, but would take another way. On their arrival, they would circumambulate the Venerable Acharn three times, keeping him always to their right; they would then seat themselves in a polite manner, all in the same posture. Their leader would then inform him as to where they had come from and to which aspect of the dharma they wished to listen. The Venerable Acharn would greet them mentally and then for a moment he would 'withdraw into silence' for the emergence of a proper topic of dharma which would be suitable to them. He would then begin his sermons, explaining the various aspects of that dharma to their satisfaction. They appreciated his sermons and would thank him uttering the word 'sadhu' [meaning 'It is well'], repeating it three times. Those with 'celestial ears' would be able to hear them but not those with the ears of a pitcher, a pan or a kettle. After that they would once again circumambulate him in the same manner and depart.

The manner of their departure was so graceful and attractive that it cannot be equaled by man. Perhaps it is the nature of their bodies, being more supple and delicate, which makes the difference. Having reached the area beyond the monastery or bhikkhus' shelters, they would soar into the air like wisps of cotton blown up by the wind. Even on their way to listen to his instructions, they would settle on the ground outside the area and walk respectfully towards the Venerable Acharn. Their manner of walking was delicate and delightful to see. Unlike some groups of human beings, these celestial angels would maintain a respectful silence, never making a noise, when approaching a person they revered. Perhaps this is the point where they are superior to men, [some of whom just cannot help chatting while listening to a sermon]. While listening to the sermon, they would be perfectly self-controlled, never looking this way or that, and they never crossed the mind of the instructor with their vanity or pride.

The Venerable Acharn was usually informed of their purpose in advance of their coming. When, for example, they wished to come at midnight, he would know of it that evening. In such a case, he would cancel the meeting of bhikkhus for that night and after leaving the track for walking meditation, he would begin his meditation sitting. At the approach of the appointed time, he would emerge [from the third profound level of concentration called appana] to the [second] level of upacara samadhi²⁰. If they had not yet arrived, he would withdraw into seclusion of [appana] for some time before emerging once again. Sometimes, however, they would already be waiting, while at other times they would be coming and soon crowding the area. When sometimes they chose to come at one or two o'clock in the morning, or, more rarely, three o'clock, he would sleep for a

²⁰ The first level of concentration is called khanika or momentary concentration. This refers to the concentration of an ordinary person without training in mind-development. This level of concentration is not enough to pick up messages from outside or to communicate with these kinds of invisible beings. The third level of concentration is called appana or full concentration and is too profound for the picking up of messages and communicating with invisible beings. This level is resorted to for seclusion, refreshment, or for strengthening the second level of concentration called upacara or access concentration.

short time after his walking and sitting meditation and then get up at the appointed time to receive them.

The angels who came to listen to his sermons in the Northeast were not as many as those in the North. But there were also some who would stealthily listen to him while he was delivering a sermon to his bhikkhu disciples. When the Venerable Acharn knew, of this, he would stop his sermon and dismiss the meeting. He would then begin his meditation sitting to contact them and give them a sermon. After their departure he would continue his regular rounds of daily activities until the following day.

This association with divine, invisible beings was particularly his own, the times being firmly fixed since they were strictly true to their word, being always punctual and admonishing anyone who did not keep the appointed time. Another characteristic of these invisible beings was that they were respectful and obedient to their leader, always listening to and promptly following his orders. It was customary for these terrestrial and celestial angels to come with their leaders.

The dialogue between the Venerable Acharn and these beings was carried on directly through mind, there being no language barrier as in the society of man and animals. Such a means of communication is more convenient in that there is no need for language. One mind touches and feels another and everything there is readily understood, much in the same way as phrases and sentences are used, and in fact, much more effectively. Such mind-to-mind communication is direct and produces the desired results with no effort and no time wasted in selecting words and phrases to convey the exact meaning. Try as one may, there are often loopholes or deficiencies in the medium of language, both verbal and written. Thus one is always liable to misinterpret the words and sentences used by another, no matter how careful and meticulous both are. Frankly speaking, words cannot hope to bridge all the gaps which always exist between two minds. It is not a perfect medium; this should be borne in mind [by word-worshippers].

As long as minds cannot resort to the direct and most accurate way of communication, however, the medium of language is indispensable. While we must be satisfied with it, we must not forget that it is not perfect and all that is in the mind cannot be transformed into words. Language is to be accepted as it is, and not as more than it can be or do. For the Venerable Acharn, however, mind-to-mind communication was one of his achievements. It belonged to him and he was able to make use of it at will.

Smallpox Eradication - His Daily Radiation of Loving-Kindness

During this period, the Venerable Acharn's practice and instruction went smoothly, there always being peace and bliss wherever he went and stayed. Bhikkhus and samaneras were impressed by his instruction and mode of practice; lay devotees were delighted whenever they learned of him. They would throng to see him and to hear him speak, and they would be amply rewarded with his impressive personality and sermons.

There was a village called Bahn Tham in the district of Tha Khak on the other side of the Mekhong River in the kingdom of Laos. Phra Acharn Sao and Phra Acharn Mun had previously stayed there for a time. A short time before the Venerable Acharn Mun arrived, almost all the people in the village had contracted smallpox. When he arrived there, they were overcome with joy, swarming out of their shelters to welcome him,

begging him to be their Refuge. He called them to a meeting and told them to accept the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha as their Refuge in place of ghosts and spirits. He also taught them the way of practice, such as to recite the passages of homage and recollection of the Triple Gem in the morning and at night before going to bed. This was to be done individually at home in addition to the collective recitation to be done twice a day. They readily and strictly obeyed him. He also did something to help him in his own inner practice.

It was then that a miracle happened. No more deaths were reported after his arrival, this despite the fact that several had died every day, even on the day just before he arrived. Those who were suffering were found to recover speedily and the infection miraculously disappeared. This unprecedented and unexpected event created an indelible impression and firm faith in that village, even up to the present day. The bhikkhu who was abbot of the monastery in that village was no less impressed. He made it a rule to join hands in homage to both the Venerable Acharns whenever he mentioned their names, and before saying anything about them. This was the result of Phra Acharn Mun's radiating loving-kindness which spread out to induce peace and bliss into the world.

The Venerable Acharn said that there were three times when he comprehensively radiated loving-kindness: in the afternoon during his sitting meditation, before going to sleep, and after waking up. There were several other occasions during the day and night when he also radiated loving-kindness in a small or [possibly more particular] way. These could not be counted or fixed. In his comprehensive radiation of loving-kindness, he would first balance his mind and radiate its force to traverse the worlds in all planes, upwards, downwards and horizontally without any interruption. The radiance of his mind at that time was indescribably bright, being limitless and unobstructed, and far brighter than hundreds or thousands of suns. There is nothing brighter than the mind that is completely purified. The radiance beaming out of an absolutely purified mind illumines the world and cools it with the tranquillizing effect it produces. There is nothing poisonous or harmful in this light which shines out of the dharma itself. A person with his mind radiating loving-kindness and purity is always welcomed with joy and reverence by both angels and human beings wherever he goes and stays. Even animals are not suspicious of him. They know that he means them no harm. The radiation of loving-kindness from such a mind is all-embracing, excluding none, being like raindrops falling to the ground.

Influence of the Wilds - Defilements vs. the Mind

On his way back from the town of Ubol Rajadhani, the Venerable Acharn spent the first Rains Retreat in Nonglahd Village in Sakol Nakhorn. There were a large number of disciples, bhikkhus, samaneras and lay devotees, all being delighted and excited to see and hear him. This excitement, however, was not based on superstitious belief or personality cult. It was their fervent desire and enthusiasm to do good and to avoid evil, to abandon ghosts and spirits, and to accept the Triple Gem as their Refuge. After the Rains Retreat, he set out, as usual, on his wanderings. This time he journeyed towards the town of Udorn Thani, passing through the districts of Nong Bua Lamphoo and Bahn Phue. One time he spent a Rains Retreat at Bahn Koh and another in the district of Ta Bo, both in the town of Nong Khai. He remained in these two towns for some years.

Most of the places where the Venerable Acharn stayed were in the wilds with villages at great distances from each other. The region was sparsely populated, the people obedient and respectful towards the teaching, and the wilds really wild. Great trees

were found in abundance. No one ever thought of felling them. Wild animals roamed about freely. At night the cries of different animals which inhabited such forests were frequently heard here and there. To a dhutanga bhikkhu, such cries always induce tranquility and compassion [rather than fear]. Unlike the sounds produced by man, such cries do not disturb him or distract his attention. Perhaps it is because the meanings of these animal sounds are incomprehensible to man, whereas sounds produced by man, be they voices speaking or quarrelling, the noise of dancing, singing, and other kinds of entertainment, convey meanings which are understandable and which induce the mind of the listener to follow along with them continuously. This is a distraction during the period of developing meditation. If it happens that such sounds were made by females, it is even more harmful and destructive. Without the armor of well-established concentration, there is a greater possibility of succumbing to it. This is not to put the blame on the female, of course. It is merely revealing the truth of what can occasionally happen to a dhutanga bhikkhu, and it is offered here as a word of warning to them so that they may conduct themselves properly in their struggle to achieve the Cessation of Suffering.

Throughout his life as a bhikkhu [except for a few periods] Phra Acharn Mun spent his time in the wilds. That was why he was able to achieve full final Attainment and then so kindly helped us to achieve the same reward.

During the period of his strenuous effort, it was as if the Venerable Acharn were being consumed by a chronic and killer disease with little hope of surviving its ferocious and repeated attacks. Body and mind were subjected to serious training and taming. No day or night passed without painful struggle. There was no looking forward to entertainment. Defilements and the mind are so delicately intertwined. So difficult is it to extricate the mind from defilements. A split-second with mindfulness absent is enough to allow defilements to whisk back in again. Once defilements have taken hold of the mind, their grip tends to become tighter with the passage of time. This necessitates constant vigilance against their stealthy approach and workings, coupled with ruthless attacks when they begin to let loose their forces. Only by having done so can a line of defense be established and the mind fairly secured from the clutch of defilements.

It was after he had attained to such a degree of Security that he came out of his seclusion to teach others. Now there were so many of them - bhikkhus, samaneras, and lay devotees - coming from all directions and coming incessantly, so much so that there were sometimes not enough sheltering places. It then became a burden to him, who had to think of their welfare and safety, especially of the female devotees and white-robed nuns.

At one time he was dwelling in the village of Bahn Mee Na Yoong, in the district of Bahn Phue in the town of Udorn Thani. The area, which was thinly populated, abounded with wild beasts, including tigers, which occasionally visited the place where he and his disciples were staying. There was danger for those who visited him and who stayed overnight there. He had to order the villagers to build raised platforms high enough to protect those lying there from tigers' leaps. During the night they were forbidden to come down and were told to make utensils or containers for when they wanted to perform bodily functions. Visitors [from faraway places] were not allowed to stay for many days since the tigers around that area were ferocious and bold. This was well known to both the villagers and the bhikkhus. Tigers often disturbed the buffaloes, forcing them to return to the village area with fright. Sometimes during the night, when he was engaged in walking meditation, the track lit by means of candles placed in lanterns at either end, he

would see a great tiger strolling majestically after the buffalo herd which was walking past, with complete indifference towards anyone.

Bhikkhus under his guidance and training had to be prepared for anything and everything. They were staying in the midst of a wild and dangerous area without any apparent protection or security. They had to abandon their vanity and self-importance and regard other members of the group as organs of the same body. These are requisites for tranquility, which remove the hindrances blocking attainment during meditation development. The mind that is forced to be confined, such as dwelling in a dangerous place, having little food and not enough requisites, and constant restraint on the part of mindfulness is in a position to calm down, to become one-pointed sooner [than if it is not so confined and forced]. Outside the threatening danger is there; inside, mindfulness is likewise issuing repeated warnings. Then there is the Acharn to put a check on straying thoughts and moods. The mind being then like a prisoner under relentless torture, both inside and outside, submits itself to training and discipline, which are in fact conducive to its own ennoblement. Results are often unexpected and undreamed of.

Fear vs. Dharma

At night, when his mind is attacked by fear, a bhikkhu forces himself to do his walking meditation in the open. This is the battle between fear and dharma. If fear is defeated, the mind will be overwhelmed by courage and enjoy profound inner peace. If fear is the victor, it will multiply itself rapidly and prodigiously. The whole body will be enveloped by both a perspiring heat and a chilling cold, by the desire to pass urine and to defecate. That bhikkhu will be suffocated by fear and he will look more like a dying than a living man. The threatening roar of a tiger from a nearby place or from far away - at the foot of the mountains, on top of them, or in the plains only serves to increase his already suffocating fear. Direction or distance mean nothing to such a bhikkhu, his only thought being that that tiger is coming to make a meal of him and that he is coming at that very moment! No matter how wide or vast that area might be, he will be hypnotized by his own fear into believing that that tiger knows of no other place to go to but the very spot on which he is walking. The passages for recitation to prevent fear disappear. Ironically, what remains is that passage which serves only to increase it. He will thus recite to himself 'The tiger is coming! The tiger is coming!'

This is the way of defeat on the part of such a bhikkhu and his dharma development. It is the admission of defeat even before the battle has begun. It is the result of abandoning the dharma. The right way is to fix the mind on any theme of dharma, such as the recollection of death, in order to keep the mind inside, shutting it off from the source of fear outside. In life or in death, the mind must not be divorced from the recitation passage or the dharma contemplated. The mind that dwells on the dharma is equipped with self-protection. It can hold its ground, despite attacks from fear, and then will come courage.

Abandonment and Detachment

Phra Acharn Mun always taught his disciples to sacrifice whatever they thought belonged to them, including this body and mind, but to never abandon the dharma, be it the way of practice or recitation at that moment. Whatever is to happen, let it happen,

for that is its natural course. Whatever is born is to die. It is impossible to resist death. That is against the law of nature. No benefit can be derived from such a perverse attitude of mind. The right way is to be courageous and determined and not to worry about death.

With regard to the place for mind development, the wilder such a place is - abounding with ferocious beasts and tigers - the better. In such a place, he said, the mind will be developed in meditation and wisdom. The tigers will help implant dharma into the mind, for when a person does not believe in the Buddha and is not afraid of him, but believes in tigers and is afraid of them, it can be a good thing after all. The fear of tigers, the picturing of oneself being devoured by tigers, may be able to drive the mind to dharma. Knowing that it is helpless, such a mind will fix itself on a theme of meditation or recitation until it is absorbed in dharma. Then it will see the wonders of the dharma and believe in the Buddha. At such a critical moment will be developed the concentration which has not yet been developed up until that time. There will also occur the wisdom or insight which has not yet occurred. A mind at leisure without any compulsion, is inert and easily falls victim to evil influences. It then accumulates defilements, only to weigh itself down. The tiger, however, will help lift the weight off the coward's shoulders, so that he may be unloaded to some extent, and will not have to tremble wherever he goes or stays.

Wherever defilements are afraid it is there that an aspirant is advised to go. Wherever the defilements are not afraid, however, let the aspirant stay away from that place. To surrender to defilements' whispering urges, is self-indulgence, from which nothing profitable can be gained. There can only be spiritual collapse in such a case which blinds the aspirant to all concepts of evil and merit.

Phra Acharn Mun often stressed to us disciples that a place that does not exercise any compulsion will not help develop the mind, but that a place where an aspirant is bound to be always cautious of lurking dangers can, in the end, be a great help to him. In such a place the mind dares not divorce itself from mindfulness, which then is the pathway of exertion. In critical moments let dharma be firmly fixed in the mind, for that is where dharma exists, and do not let the mind stray outside. Then will come strength of will and consequent security. Death cannot come when it is not yet its time, and instead of the death that was imagined and anticipated will come unexpected strength of will and courage. It is this practice of holding fast to the dharma inside and not succumbing to outward influences that will lead an aspirant to the final fulfillment of his aim.

There is no substantial development to be gained from self-complacency or self-discouragement. An aspirant must cultivate the live-with-dharma and die-with-dharma attitude of mind in every way, which alone can assure his advancement. This will enable him to face whatever dangers may stand in his way in wild and fearful places. The more critical the situation, the more firm the mind's hold must be on the theme of dharma selected. From such a mind the attacker will draw back, be it a tiger a snake, or an elephant. The aspirant may even be able to walk right up to it. His attitude towards them is based on loving-kindness, which has a mysterious but real and profound influence. His mind is clothed with dharma, whereas the animals' are not. His mind is therefore more powerful than theirs. It is true that animals do not know this, but they can feel and sense it. This is the power of dharma which gives protection to the aspirant, meanwhile softening or neutralizing the ferocity of the animals. This is the mysterious power of mind which is self-evident but which is still difficult for others to realize who have not yet developed to the same level.

As far as this aspect of dharma is concerned, it will always be mysterious to those who study it intellectually in various institutions however worldwide it may be. It is when dharma unfolds in the mind that the mind will be able to know what dharma is, depending on the degree of depth of the dharma unfolded. When both are in complete union, there is no more question between them. Both are equally subtle, delicate and mysterious. And in the level of complete union, it can be said that mind is dharma and dharma is mind. No contradiction now exists since the defilements [contradictors] are removed.

The priceless mind now appears to be worthless since it has become the tool of defilements, being subjugated by them until its own value is lost. A mind living in such degradation, without any attempt to purify or rectify itself, will undergo hundreds or thousands of births and deaths in vain. No lesson is learnt, no improvement made, and no progress is achieved. It is like a person changing one dirty and shabby shirt for another. He may have changed his shirt a thousand times, but in the end, the thousandth shirt is as shabby and dirty as the first one. But when another person gives up the dirty shirt for the sake of a new cleaner one, he looks cleaner with his first change. This is a lesson for one who wishes to change the dress of his own mind, to improve its worth and to enhance its value. This is the most significant task for everyone, from an irretraceable past to an endless - endless until the mind is uplifted to the point of finality, when no more change of dress for purification is needed. This refers to the Buddha and his Noble Disciples, the Refuges of all virtuous people, and even of virtuous people, who, after all, do not discard or forget the Triple Gem. A comparison can be made with a great family having many offsprings, some good and some evil, but all having the greatest esteem for their parents.

The Way of Deprivation Based on Dharma Is One of Liberation

Such was the mode of practice recommended by Phra Acharn Mun. Those who followed him obediently and reverently were bound to attain to the same inner development and insight dawning upon their own minds, this apart from the way of life his disciples have inherited and instructed their disciples in turn. All this reveals the significant fact that the Buddha's Dispensation can still produce the same Path and Fruition as before.

Frankly speaking, the mode of practice of the Venerable Acharn may be called the way of deprivation as far as material requisites are concerned. Food was not enough, places of shelter were poor, robes were always wanting, other requisites were lacking more or less. To those who are used to a life of comfort, luxury and entertainment, this way of life is certainly wretched and miserable beyond compare. Obviously there is nothing delightful in such deprivation and self-imprisonment. To Phra Acharn Mun, however this life was accepted voluntarily and was supported by the dharma. Every moment of suffering and endurance was not without dharma, for this was self-training based on dharma. What appeared to be wretched and miserable to others became pleasant and comfortable to those whose life was guided by dharma and who willingly accepted all these privations.

This way of practice can also be called the practice of self-denial. Whether in sitting, standing, walking or lying down, whether in eating or in doing anything, whether in traveling someplace or staying anywhere, there was always the denying oneself of the physical desire to enjoy or indulge in that action. There was no leniency for physical pleas

or cries for ease and comfort. At times there would be an uninterrupted fast for several days in order to carry on an uninterrupted exertion. There was, of course, suffering during that period, but there was also mindfulness to remind the aspirant of his endurance for the sake of exertion.

This way of practice is of course agreeable to those aspirants who are cut out for this kind of austerity. For them to eat every day may strengthen the health of the body but it enfeebles the mind which has become dull and static. Thus the only way is to sacrifice the strength of the body to some extent by fasting for a period of time. The duration of such a fast is up to the strength and endurance of the body plus the observation of the condition of one's own mind, both of which help to determine the middle point. In some cases a fast can last for several days when it is found to be within the endurance of body and mind and when it is found to not upset the point of balance. The suffering which then arises is counteracted by endurance, which is in turn strengthened by will power, which again is urged on by the determination to achieve the end of all suffering.

During the period of fasting, an aspirant observing the conditions of his own mind will be able to know whether or not this mode of practice is agreeable to him. To some, the longer they fast, the more courageous and brilliant the mind is, it being strengthened and more dynamic.

During meditation, the swinging pendulum of time stops - day and night are lost in the radiance of dharma, hunger and fatigue totally disappear. What prevails is ecstatic absorption in dharma. Now is the time for an aspirant to take advantage of this opportunity when such defilements as laziness and fickleness are sleeping, as it were. If but once he is able to climb upon their backs and put a yoke on them, then he should not hesitate. A delay means greater risk and the possibility of a great loss. Once they are allowed to wake up the odds may be against him, who might become a tamed elephant at the mercy of the hook of the mahout, for long have our minds been dominated by the power of the defilements like an elephant under the mahout's hook. The mind dreads the hook just as a burnt child fears fire. What can counteract the mahout's hook of the defilements in this case is only the dharma.

From the worldly point of view, however, mind and defilements have become inseparable companions. This produces two different categories of men: one, based on dharma, struggle for a life independent of the mahout's hook; the other, guided by the defilements, has to pamper them and submissively follow their orders. What results from this second way of life is self-evident to themselves and to others, for the force of the defilements accumulated in the mind will sooner or later be let loose in words and deeds. The harder the mahout strikes his hook, the more the blood of suffering is spilled from the wounded mind. This is why an aspirant who realizes this truth is so determined in his struggle for self-liberation. Hunger and other privations in the course of that struggle are willingly accepted. Even death, when it is the result of that struggle, is regarded as a sacrifice on the altar of dharma. To such a mind the path is irreversible and absolute.

Phra Acharn Mun, having realized through his own Attainment the forces of the defilements and dharma, went back to the Northeast and undertook to instruct his disciples in accordance with the dharma he had periodically attained to and realized. By that way he always encouraged bhikkhus and samaneras to be steadfast and to take delight in liberating themselves from the enslaving power of their own defilements.

The Five Powers

The topic of dharma most often taught by Phra Acharn Mun to encourage his disciples was the Five Powers of faith or confidence, exertion, mindfulness, meditation, and wisdom. He reasoned that an aspirant who always equips himself with these Five Powers can expect only progress and development, never loss or decline, wherever he goes or stays. Following is the substance of his instruction to bhikkhus which is frank and straightforward, being highly enlightening and encouraging. It was, of course, in line with his way of life.

'Saddha refers to faith or confidence in the Teaching of the Buddha which he has so kindly bestowed upon the world. Buddhists are among those who can be blessed with the light of that Teaching, if we are sincere and earnest in our practice. We know that we are destined to die sooner or later. But the time when we die is not quite as important as how we die. Are we going to die defeated by defilements, being entangled in the cycle of defilements, karma, and the results of karma? Or are we going to die having terminated the process of this cycle? The word 'defeat' is undesirable everywhere. Even children playing games want to win. They don't look for defeat. This should be a lesson for dhutanga bhikkhus who must strive courageously for victory. If he is defeated, his way of life is one of the defeated. His manner and his gestures are sure to be depressing while his miseries are overwhelming. There is no benefit to be expected from such a death when a heap of suffering will be piled upon the dying person, giving him no breathing space.

'To follow the Buddha and his Noble Disciples it is imperative that we have faith or confidence in him, believe his teaching, equip ourselves with his exertion and endurance, protect ourselves with his protective mindfulness, and follow his way of practice. Be steadfast in your duty. Do not be fickle through the lack of mindfulness. Strive with determination to fulfill the causes that produce the effects in the manner he has laid down for us. His is the Teaching for a man of wisdom. It is wisdom in all aspects in the manner he has expounded. , We must cultivate this wisdom while listening, eating, drinking, in whatever we are doing, so as to avoid self-delusion or ignorance, which produces nothing good. What use can be expected from an ignorant man, woman, or child? A dhutanga bhikkhu must not be submerged in the slough of ignorance which is taking things for granted. Such is not the Path to the Cessation of Suffering. It is never becoming to him who is recognized as a recluse [samana], the kind of people who must always equip themselves with wisdom.'

These are the main points of his instructions given most often to his dhutanga bhikkhu disciples. It was bold and direct. It was meant for aspirants who were already determined in the battle between defilements and dharma, for those who were prepared to accept any challenge for the sake of final victory, which is Deliverance, Nirvana.

To Speak with Courage and Confidence

It was learned from a Venerable Acharn who had been one of Phra Acharn Mun's elderly disciples that a gathering of bhikkhus and samaneras under his guidance, however large, looked like a gathering of those who had done away with all defilements. Never was there any uncontrolled word or gesture to be seen. All were modest and serene, whether they were where they dwelt or in a meeting. So flawless and impressive was their manner that one could easily be tempted to believe that all

were arahants, were it not for the questions they put to the Venerable Acharn regarding their experiences during meditation development. What level each questioner had attained to, however, could be surmised from the questions asked, since those questions involved meditation and wisdom, from the elementary to the advanced level of insight.

Whether in answering questions or instructing his bhikkhus, Phra Acharn Mun spoke out with such courage and confidence that his disciples were assured that the dharma which he spoke was the dharma which he had realized for himself, that it was not dharma which he had speculated about or imagined. The tacit assurance given his listeners was that if they persisted in their efforts in the manner he prescribed, one day they too would be able to realize the dharma of his Attainment.

All of his instructions were modified to suit the degree of maturity of his listeners, who were bhikkhus, samaneras, and lay devotees. His explanations were given in detail so that they could be easily remembered and put into practice. To lay disciples especially he explained dharma which was relevant to them -generosity, morality, and mind-development. The Venerable Acharn taught them that these three practices are fundamental to birth as a human being and also to the life of Buddhism as a movement. Every human being must have accumulated at least one of the three in his or her former lives, otherwise he or she would not have assumed a human body and taken birth in the human world.

Generosity [dana] is the first expression of a noble human being, who is urged by compassion towards other human beings or animals in a condition inferior to him. This may be done in the form of money or other material goods, in the form of advice or counsel regarding secular or religious knowledge, the latter being called dhamma-dana. Generosity in this context must be done without hope for any return, except the inward karmic effect of generosity itself, which is the mind that has been conditioned and ennobled by that selfless purpose. Another aspect of generosity is the willingness to forgive another who has done wrong to oneself. A person taking delight in generosity [in its variously mentioned aspects] is recognized in society with a respectful love, regardless of his physical appearance. He is loved by men and also by invisible beings who can be collectively called angels [devata, both terrestrial and celestial]. Wherever he goes he will never be in a helpless situation. In the world of human beings it is obvious how a person equipped with the practice of generosity can be said to have adorned, himself with 'up-to-date, modern fashion', and to be a delight to all. Generosity is looked forward to, even by a wealthy miser, not to mention helpless people. Those whose habit it is to practice generosity will, by the karmic effects thereof, be far from privation, no matter in what plane of existence he takes his birth. The practice of generosity helps nourish and sustain human society, making life in it meaningful and hopeful. Without generosity the world, would soon be bleak and barren. Hence the importance of generosity for oneself and others in human society. In other words, a mind unmoved to generosity would surely run dry and become desolate, being devoid of all dharma.

Morality [sila] is the protective fence for the security and welfare of people's lives and property, and it is also the preventative measure against doing harm to another's person and feelings. It is another well-spring of higher mind-ennoblement. A human being who cannot be restrained by any kind and degree of morality is like a devastating fire in the society in which he lives. When the majority of people are moved to behaving without the restraints of morality, just imagine what conflagration of crime and violence would sweep the world, consuming its inhabitants and laying waste its terrain! The world might develop materially until it can bury itself under its devices and gadgets for physical

comfort, but it can also burn itself up by its own negligence of morality, which can produce a ray of heat far more devastating than many suns. Never can there be peace in a world which values matter above morality.

The Buddha, a superman among men, was perfectly equipped with morality which he said is his ornament. This he kindly presented to the world with a view to adorning and uplifting its mind. By its very nature, a mind that is moved by the power of defilements emits heat which consumes itself and others. Without the restraint of morality, or worse still, with the sinister tendency to feed and flatter defilements, it is evident how the world will soon become an inferno where peoples are victimized by the wild beasts or monsters of their own creation. This is the inevitable fate awaiting the world that allows itself to be dominated by its own defilements, as opposed to the world that pays heed to the Buddha's instruction, which always radiates peaceful bliss to all who care and dare to follow it. This difference should be weighed by Buddhists so that they may be able to reduce if they are not yet able to remove the power of defilements. Morality may therefore be likened to medicine for a chronic and epidemic disease. At the least, in some cases, the medicine will help to contain the disease, or, at the most, in other cases, the disease will be completely cured by it.

The writer himself was so impressed and delighted in his sermon on the value of morality after having listened to it, that he could not help wanting to observe the Precepts of the lay devotees, forgetting that in fact that he was already observing the bhikkhu's code of discipline, which is far broader. His joy and delight at that moment were quite overwhelming. This also serves to reveal a truth of another color - that of the person who, having been hypnotized by suggestive words to do evil, just cannot help being eager to follow that suggestion. It is therefore imperative that a person's thoughts should at all times be under the scrutinizing eye of mindfulness and wisdom in order to detect the nature of those thoughts and to deal with them properly and in time.

Mind-Development [bhavana] is the system of training the mind to accept the dictates of reason and dharma, to know how to deal properly with itself and other situations, and then to prevent the mind from being ill-disciplined and running wild. It is through the system of mind-development that an untrained mind can be calmed down and brought under control which will be for the sake of its own peacefulness. An untrained mind is like an untrained horse or any other kind of untrained animal, which cannot be expected to work for its master's benefit.

Mind-development is exactly that: it is for the development or ennoblement of nothing other than the mind itself. It enables the mind to function properly in whatever work it is put to, be that work crude or delicate, small or great, internal or external. A person who submits himself to the system of mind-development is inclined towards thoughtful and dispassionate consideration before doing anything. This helps to minimize errors and wastage, together with danger and evil results that might occur to himself and others. The developed mind can therefore reap benefits for both the present and the future.

Whatever there is to be done must be done well - not carelessly or half-heartedly, but with its possible advantages in mind. Mind-development, which is the ability to govern oneself in accordance with the law - the law of cause and effect and of righteousness - also means self-government. In following such a law, no prejudice or personal likes and dislikes are allowed to insert themselves into a person's judgment. Many a person has been known to have been spoiled by succumbing to personal considerations and to have regretted their own decisions. The sooner they can return to self-government, the

less bitter their regret. This is why the system of mind-development can help a person counteract his own prejudices and hasty conclusions, thus keeping him always on the Path of Righteousness. This system is naturally not without its difficulties, since it is nothing but self-control, which is committing the monkey-mind to discipline. It is in sharp conflict with the raw nature of both the monkey and the mind.

Mind-development is nothing but mind-observation. It is the observation of the spasmodic and flitting movements of the mind through the establishment of mindfulness [sati]. In order to establish that mindfulness, a theme for recollection or recitation is usually used. Some commonly used themes are the mantra-words buddho, dhammo and sangho; objects such as hair on the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth or skin; and the recollection of death. Mantra-words may be used either singly or in groups by reciting them forwards and backwards. Here attempts must be made or force exerted, to fix the mind upon the selected theme [hence the term 'exertion' for such continuous or uninterrupted attempts].

When the mind can be made to dwell upon the theme that does not by its nature produce a harmful effect on an undeveloped mind, a blissful peace will come as a result. When the degree of that blissful peace is enough to sustain the mind, the theme previously used to establish it is no longer necessary, since the mind is now able to independently maintain itself and withdraw into the seclusion of inward peace. After a time it will emerge, that is, it will come back to the former level of consciousness. The aspirant is then advised to repeat the process for the sake of inward peace until he is at home with it, being able to withdraw to that state at will. With this achievement, the mind that used to fall victim to evil influences will gradually be able to divorce itself from them and will come willingly to accept its own responsibility. There will be less force needed to be exerted on the mind in order to subject it to discipline.

Mind-Development Is Mind-Treatment for Mind-Diseases

There may be a number of readers [especially lay disciples] who are discouraged when it comes to following the system of mind development. The common complaint of the householder whose time is occupied in earning money and raising a family, is that it is just impossible to find more time for meditation without affecting their immediate duties in one way or another, and they are satisfied with this self-consoling excuse. Frankly speaking, complaints such as this on the part of lay disciples are likely to cause them much harm and decline unless this attitude of mind is corrected.

The system of mind-development is the curative measure for mental suffering in much the same way as are those curatives for physical suffering employed by the world. In warm weather we bathe; in cold weather we cover ourselves with blankets; when we are hungry and thirsty, we eat and drink; in time of illness we take medicines. These are the conventional curative measures for bodily suffering and discomfort. People afflicted with the above mentioned do not procrastinate, nor do they make excuses that it is too hot or too cold, or that they are too busy doing something else to attend to such troubles or afflictions. This is common to all, regardless of background. Even animals are no exception to this and we can see how they really have to struggle for their survival. The system of mind-development is the same, the only difference being that it is directed at the mind, which is the root of all progress and decline, and since it is the root of all progress and decline, it merits special attention on the part of all.

The mind of the worldling has a peculiar characteristic. It tends to reach out [with tentacles like an octopus] to attach itself to all that it can reach which it has decided must be associated with it or which belongs to it. It pays little heed as to whether or not those things are right or wrong, good or evil, harmful or helpful, and less still as to whether or not it has power enough to deal with them. Often these self-imposed burdens become exhausting 'homework', robbing one of even time to eat and sleep. There appears to be no limit to the activities of the hungry mind, nor does it appear to take a rest. When the body is exhausted from the burdens it bears, it cries out for a rest, and sooner or later it must of necessity get such a rest. But the mind is not that fortunate. It is always troubled by its own restless reaching out, even during sleep when it still churns and seethes in the symbols of dreams. There is no method of moderation which acts as a brake. Such a mind heaps untold miseries on itself.

Mind can be called a 'born fighter' or a 'reckless fighter'. ' Unless its attitude is corrected by dharma, the fight is sure to continue on recklessly or more importantly, hopelessly, life after life. There is no hope for its unloading its self-imposed burden. There is no check put on the mind on the part of dharma. The mind may succeed in accumulating piles of riches, but as long as it does not avail itself of the shelter of dharma, such piles of riches will only be piles of suffering, never of happiness and peace.

Dharma, all men of wisdom agree, is the protector of a person's riches as well as of his mind. The more obedient a person's mind is to dharma the more happiness his riches, small or great, will bring him. Without dharma, however, a mountain of riches would not be enough to produce happiness in its owner. Material possessions are, in fact, but the instruments or the mediums of happiness for a man of wisdom! They cannot of themselves produce any happiness whatsoever. The mind deprived of dharma will not be able to extract any happiness from them. To a mind properly trained and adequately developed, no suffering, no hardship, no obstacle or torture can adversely affect it. Mind can be ennobled by proper training and it can remain self-collected and self-possessed.

Mind is subjected to incessant work and worry, day and night year after year. If it were a piece of machinery, such as a car, it would have been turned into scrap iron long ago. There is no hope to be able to repair any machine under so heavy a burden as is the mind. A person's mind is like a machine in one sense -it needs maintenance, repairs, and safeguarding against dangers, and nothing can perform all these functions better than the system of mind-development. Having realized this truth, a wise man should not neglect to take care of his own mind as he would take care of his most precious possession.

The health of the mind is no less important than that of the body, and to preserve and promote this, the wise man should be aware of his own mind-conditioners - his thoughts and his moods - differentiating the malevolent from the beneficial. Malevolent thoughts and moods destroy health, sapping the strength of body and mind, whereas beneficial thoughts and moods promote their health with a pacifying and purifying effect. The nature of the body should also be contemplated. With the lapse of time, is there anything fresh and new that can be relied upon, or is there any sign of decline and depreciation that manifests itself more plainly? Should we rest satisfied with it, or should we prepare ourselves to minimize its impact on our mind? Deathbed repentance does not pay!

This is one instance of mind-development, which is, in reality self-warning, self-instructing, and self-observation, detecting one's own faults and drawbacks in order to rectify them.

When this method of mind-development is applied in sitting meditation or in any of the other postures of the body as often as possible, the mind will be calmed down and not be carried away by pride [in youth, health, and life]. In thus experiencing the bliss of peace, the mind stops consuming itself with self-imposed suffering. Moderation is then cultivated in the mode of life and the kind of work involved. The sources of ruin [such as gambling, drinking, night-roving, etc.] are willingly avoided.

There are many more benefits to be obtained from mind-development than can be described here, but as this instruction was meant for lay disciples the Venerable Acharn did not elaborate as much as he would with his bhikkhu disciples. What is presented in these pages has been arbitrarily selected and extracted. Any criticism should be directed to the compiler, not at the Venerable Acharn, who knows nothing of this.

It is known that the Venerable Acharn spoke about high dharma only in the circle of his close disciples. What is written in this book is the result of information supplied by a number of his contemporary disciples who had been trained under his guidance for a period of time. This book has been compiled so that it may be of some use to a number of people who are interested in this aspect of Buddhism, and so that they will be encouraged in some way by his mode of practice, which was so unique and remarkable in his time. The Venerable Acharn's practice was that of an immovably determined fighter with the indomitable courage to face anything and everything. There appears to have been none under his guidance and training who are as steadfast in either the dhutanga observances or other practices as was he. Truly his mode of practice and inward attainments are unexcelled in modern times.

Visits by Serpent-King and Angels

While staying on and around the mountains in the towns of Udorn Thani and Nong Khai, the Venerable Acharn was occasionally visited by both terrestrial and celestial angels who approached him for his sermon. They would come once a fortnight or once a month, which visits were not as frequent as those of the angels in the town of Chiangmai. This will be dealt with below.

Earlier, during the period of his strenuous exertion, he was staying on a mountainside in Thailand, west of the town of Luang Phra Bang in the kingdom of Laos. The Venerable Acharn said that under that mountain lived a large town of nagas²¹[serpents]. Unlike the angels who often asked him many questions, the nagas hardly ever had any, but their impression and delight in the dharma was equal in both cases. Almost every night during his stay there he was visited by the naga-king who usually came with a small retinue except on some special occasions when he was followed by a large band of courtiers. On such an occasion, the Venerable Acharn would be informed of their visit in advance.

²¹ This is an invisible, magical creature, half snake and half man. It can assume human form at will and can also make itself visible to men whenever it so desires. According to the Pali Canon, it was this creature which transformed itself into a man and who was then ordained as a bhikkhu in the time of the Buddha. After his ordination, while sleeping his body unconsciously changed itself back into that of a serpent. It was because of this incident that the Buddha had included into the Ordination Procedure the question: 'Are you a man?' This was to prevent a non-human being who has taken human form from being ordained. Modern scholars for the most part do not take this story seriously, saying that it a) has a symbolic meaning, or b) it was later added to the Canon after the final passing away of the Buddha.

The nagas preferred coming later in the evening, around ten o'clock. Perhaps this was because the place where he stayed was quite some distance from the village and thus very quiet. In other places they would sometimes come later than that.

The naga-king was greatly impressed in the Venerable Acharn and asked him to stay there as long as possible so that he could be of assistance to the nagas. The naga-king sent naga-guards to protect and guard him day and night. They did not approach him too closely, but kept a respectful distance so that they would be able to see the whole area.

The angels preferred coming later than the nagas, from midnight to one or two o'clock in the morning, moreso when the place was far from a village. Only a few groups had been in the habit of coming earlier than that.

His Routine Practice in Middle Age - Sermons for Invisible Visitors

After having finished his morning meal, the Venerable Acharn would begin his walking meditation, which he would continue until about noon. He would then rest for a brief period before beginning his sitting meditation, which would last about one hour and a half, and then he would resume his walking meditation. At four o'clock in the afternoon he would sweep the monastery area or the area around where he happened to be staying. Sweeping finished, he would then bathe and continue his walking meditation until about eight or nine o'clock in the evening, when he would again resume his sitting meditation. If it was the dry season or if it wasn't raining, he would continue his walking meditation until quite late at night before retiring to the small raised platform which was his resting place. If it were very late, he would go directly to sleep, but generally he would sleep about eleven o'clock and wake up at about three o'clock in the morning.

If a group of angels were to come for a sermon, of which he would have been informed in the afternoon, he would either sleep early if they were to come very late, or he would wait for them if they were to come around midnight. It sometimes happened in some places where he stayed that groups of both terrestrial and celestial angels wished, to come for a sermon on the same night. The Venerable Acharn would then deliver a short sermon to the first group to come, answer their important questions, and then tell them that there was another group waiting to come next. The first group would then take their leave of him, and the next group would take their places.

The sermons which he gave to these groups of angels were generally based on the dharma topic which appeared to his mind while he was contemplating what to preach. It would sometimes happen that the leader of one group would express the desire to listen to a particular aspect of the dharma, and the Venerable Acharn would then contemplate that topic and explain it accordingly. Occasionally he would have to ask them for clarification of what it was they wanted to hear as apparently the terminology used for different topics differed from the terminology he knew. It sometimes happened that a group of angels wished to listen to a discourse on a particular sutra, which he already knew by the name they gave him, but on beginning his explanation, it turned out that they were not the same after all. They would stop him and inform him of this.

Although the Venerable Acharn was staying in the wilds far from human abodes, he was often busy welcoming and teaching these invisible guests - terrestrial and celestial angels and nagas - sometimes many groups in one night. In cases such as this, he would have to schedule them. There was hardly a night when a group of some kind did not pay him a visit. When he stayed near a village or a town, there would be more human visitors, whom he would welcome in the afternoon and evening. He would then teach his bhikkhu and samanera disciples who would gather for his guidance and instruction.

Sermons for Human Beings and Angels - Listening Ability Compared

The Venerable Acharn said that there was a significant difference between angels and human beings as far as giving sermons was concerned. The angels appeared to be able to understand the teachings far more easily than human beings. They also showed profound respect to their instructor while before him. None of them was ever known to have cherished any ill feelings towards him. Their every movement was pleasantly delicate. Whether they were arriving, listening to a sermon, or departing, they were at all times calm, composed and serenely gentle.

Ironically, giving a sermon to human beings sometimes became very difficult, both for himself and his listeners. Even after repeated and diverse explanations, there would be very little understanding of what he had said. And besides this incapacity for understanding, there would in some cases be contempt and criticism as well.

'What is this sermon? I can't make heads or tails of it,' they would think. 'Another bhikkhu I know can do far better than he.'

Others proudly compared themselves with him. 'I used to do better, so much better than that,' they would say to themselves. 'Often when I preached, the listeners laughed until their sides ached. Nobody was ever sleepy! In a dharma debate [where two bhikkhus conversed on dharma, asking and answering questions in turn] it was all the better. Our listeners would surrender themselves to roars of laughter from start to finish.'

And there were others who thought, 'He is known to be able to read others' minds. Why doesn't he know what I'm thinking right now, at this very moment? If he does know what I am thinking, then he should have already said that thinking in this way is wrong. Then I would know for sure he can read my mind.'

What was worse, some came only to find fault with him, and nothing more. They came feeling superior to him, and they never took any interest in the substance of his sermons or instructions. Whatever dharma they heard went in one ear and out the other, like water rolling off a duck's back.

When referring to these incidents, the Venerable Acharn chuckled, perhaps being amused at finding such 'wise' people once in a great while.

A Mountain of Pride

Then there were those who carried their pride and egotism with them. It was surprising how they managed to walk at all, carrying a mountain of pride on their shoulders as they did. Within their whole beings were to be found only chunks of vanity and egotism so large that they were terrifying, not pitiful. People such as these deserved no sermons at all, but sometimes it happened that it was unavoidable²² and he found himself in the position of having to give them a perfunctory sermon. No dharma topic ever appeared to his mind. The Venerable Acharn said that maybe the 'chunks' scared the dharma away, leaving him alone and helpless, like a lifeless doll being pricked by the needles of their malicious intent. 'What they said was right after all,' he said as he recalled these incidents in the circle of his disciples. 'I was at my wit's end trying to find any topic suitable to them. But how could I ever have hoped to find one, they being more tree-stumps than human beings?' He chuckled. At this, some of his disciples began to shake, not with cold, but with fear [at the thought of the danger possessing such chunks brought to their owners].

The Venerable Acharn said that only if it was unavoidable would he give them a sermon, because for such people as these, a sermon would be like poison, producing only harmful effects, and this because of their own disrespect and evil intent, not because of the dharma, which generates only helpful and invaluable effects in those who listen with reverence and respect. It is attitude of mind which is the source of differences occurring to different people listening to the same dharma. Some can be consumed and oppressed by it, whereas others are enchanted by that very same dharma and seem to be swept off their feet.

The Venerable Acharn really wished to help these fault-finders and to minimize the harmful effects on them, but there was just no way of doing so. At one time he thought that even if there wasn't any profit from such attempts to help them, there shouldn't be any harm either. But even this was in vain. They never ceased harboring evil and emitting its poisonous effects and consuming themselves, and all the while taking no interest in the dharma.

Teaching human beings was thus very difficult for him, even when they came in small groups. Invariably there would be those who harbored enough evil, should he ever have allowed himself to be irritated by it, to irritate even him. But in the end, when all means to irritate and annoy him had been exhausted, those people were left to their fate, to reap what they had insisted on sowing. Again he pitied them.

But there were those who came to see him with genuine purposes and sincere belief. They were instructed and trained in compliance with their maturity and tendencies. These, however, were far outnumbered by those with fantastic craze and perverse ideas, and it was because of these people that he often preferred living alone in the forests and mountains, where exertion could be intensified to his heart's content without any disturbances. No matter where he looked, there was nothing to distract his eyes or disturb his mind. The noises and cries of the birds and beasts in the wilds were to him a symphonic orchestra of heavenly beauty. It could be heard in the branches of the trees and on the ground, round the clock. He and all the animals there lived in peace and harmony together, each going their own way without any fear or danger from any others.

²² There were times when senior bhikkhus, having heard of the Venerable Acharn's fame, from some town or from Bangkok went to see him with envy in their hearts and with the purpose of proving him wrong. This why he said he could not refuse their requests, although he knew full well how useless and harmful to themselves such sermons would be.

Within this environment breathing forth the melodious song of nature, his mind was bathed in an uninterrupted stream of invigorating freshness and tranquility. Whatever thoughts there were about attaining to the dharma, all flowed clearly to the heart. Should death have come at that time there would have been but complete detachment and resignation, a quiet and peaceful departure in the wilds, the mind unaffected by the natural phenomena occurring to the body alone. Such was the passing away of most arahants. Having come alone, they depart alone, often unseen and unsung, for that is the natural way of taking leave of this world. They are not disturbed by pain and suffering, putting it where it belongs - in the body. Such is the Noble way of living and passing away, which steers clear of all defilements. With the elimination of the defilements, they are purified. With purity they are detached. To the Noble Disciples, the lighter their burden, the greater their attempts to unload themselves. To the worldling, however, the heavier his load, the greater his attempts to burden himself. Having unloaded himself of his burden, the Noble Disciple stays with 'nothingness'. They are 'out of a job', so to speak [having reached the point of finality] but not 'unemployed' [for who ever could have employed them?]

There were in fact more differences between angels and human beings, but the above are all that can be remembered. Perhaps they will be of some use to those who are interested. Some other accounts of angels will be dealt with below. The angels and human beings mentioned above, however, lived some decades ago, and are subject to the all-embracing law of change. Let us hope that with the advancement of education in modern times they will all change for the better to the betterment of themselves and their society or country at large.

Malaria Infested Forests

After having instructed the people, bhikkhus, and samaneras in the towns of Nong Khai and Udorn Thani for some time, the Venerable Acharn returned to the town of Sakol Nakhorn, wandering through the villages in the mountain and forest regions of the districts of Varijabhoom, Phangkone, Sawahng Dindan, Vanorn Nivas and Agas Amnuay. He then wandered to Nakhorn Phanom through the district of Sri Songkrahm, passing such villages as Sarm Phong, None Dang, Dong Noi and Kham Noke, all being deep in the wilds and infested with malaria and other jungle fevers. Once a person had contracted any of these diseases [especially malaria] it would be stubbornly chronic for months or years, if it did not prove fatal within a short time. The patient would then become the burden of everyone, since he would be too enfeebled to work, but he could still eat and sleep as usual. Such a condition of being only a consumer but not being able to produce anything is called according to a Thai idiom 'being loathed by one's in-laws'. Many villagers in the forest areas were known to have contracted this debilitating disease, some becoming invalids for life.

The dhutanga bhikkhus and samaneras fared little better than the villagers and were themselves afflicted with these diseases. During the three years that Venerable Acharn spent in the village of Sarm Phong, a number of bhikkhus were stricken with and died from malaria. Those who were born in towns and who lived in meadows and other open places could not adjust to the forest atmosphere. A number of bhikkhus from the towns of Ubol Rajadhani, Roi Ed and Mahasarakham could not adapt themselves to the forest atmosphere nor could they withstand the diseases to be found there. They were not able

to stay with the Venerable Acharn for a long period of time, and soon had to take leave of him to stay in open places farther away from those wild forested regions.

It was at this forest village of Sarm Phong that the Venerable Acharn told his disciples about a naga-king who would secretly listen to his instructions to his bhikkhus and samaneras during their nightly meetings. This naga-king dwelt somewhere along the Songkhram river and made it a rule to come every wan phra²³ when he would come while the Venerable Acharn was instructing his bhikkhus and samaneras, or late at night during his meditation sitting. The terrestrial and celestial angels also came, but not as frequently as in the towns of Udorn or Nong Khai. But on special occasions, such as the first day of the Rains Retreat, the midpoint of the Rains Retreat and the final day of the Rains Retreat, wherever he was staying, in the wilds or in a town, there was always one group or another of these beings coming to listen to his sermons. One instance of this was when the Venerable Acharn stayed in the monastery of Chedi Luang in the city of Chiangmai [750 kms north of Bangkok].

The Well-Digging Incident -A Demonstration of His Clairvoyance

Another remarkable incident occurred while he was staying at the village of Sarm Phong. It was during a dry season and there were at that time some sixty to seventy bhikkhus and samaneras under his guidance and training. There wasn't enough water, and whatever water there was was turbid. The bhikkhus and samaneras consulted with the villagers and agreed to deepen the well in order to reach clearer water further below. One of the elder bhikkhus then approached the Venerable Acharn and informed him of their plan. The Venerable Acharn was silent for a moment and then sternly prohibited them from doing so, saying 'No, you mustn't try to dig that well deeper! It's dangerous!' He stopped and said nothing more. That elderly bhikkhu was taken aback by the sternness of his reply. He went back and told the others what the Venerable Acharn had said, but instead of taking heed, they insisted on carrying out their plan, but this time in secret. They reasoned that since the well was some distance from the monastery, the Venerable Acharn would know nothing about it.

At noon, thinking that the Venerable Acharn was resting in his shelter they all went to the well and started digging. Before long however the earth of the upper part of the well suddenly caved in, filling in the well to its original level, thus bringing to naught all their efforts. What was worse, one of the diggers was almost killed by the collapsing earth. This, then, was their punishment for disobeying his order, none of them having been mindful enough to try to stop the others from carrying out their plan. Now they were very frightened, fearing that the Venerable Acharn would know that they have violated his order. With hearts heavy with regret they put up a fence around the collapsing earth and earnestly expressed their regret in their hearts, mentally asking for the Venerable Acharn's forgiveness and asking for his help in digging out the collapsed earth so that at least there would be some water which was usable. They then began the work of clearing out the well, and soon everything went miraculously well and they all smiled weakly in relief. The guilt of what they had done, however still rested heavily on their consciences, and when their task was finished, all - bhikkhus, samaneras, and lay

²³ On the full moon day, the half-moon day of both the waxing moon and the waning moon, and the last-moon day (the day before the new moon.) These are calculated on the basis of the lunar calendar.

devotees - quickly returned to their shelters, and there they trembled in shame and fear for what they had done.

Evening time was meeting time, and with the approach of dusk they were all the more consumed by the fires of their guilt. The all-knowing power of the Venerable Acharn was known to all beyond doubt. He could still recall evil thoughts which had passed through their minds and which they had forgotten about, and he would sternly criticize their thinkers. How would it not be possible to hide this matter of overt violation of his order from him? They all expected without a doubt that the sermon that evening or next morning would be strong. But when the time for the meeting arrived, the Venerable Acharn ordered the meeting cancelled. There was no sign of what it was they were anticipating with such fear. Indeed, the Venerable Acharn knew about it all along, but being the wise teacher that he was, he knew that if he touched upon that matter it would make matters even worse. He could see them being consumed by the fires of their own remorse. That was punishment enough.

The next morning, after his sitting meditation, the Venerable Acharn began his walking meditation which he continued until it was time to go for alms-food in the village. The bhikkhus and samaneras were waiting trembling with fear for this moment, expecting a reproach from him since the previous evening had passed without incident. The Venerable Acharn, however, spoke to them gently, as if to cool their inner fire, saying, 'We are aspirants to dharma. We should therefore not be too cowardly or too bold. Everyone makes mistakes at some time or other, but having made them, we should admit that fact. The Buddha also made mistakes, but he admitted them and tried to correct himself. Intentions may be good, but they can also be mixed with ignorance. It is our duty to be more heedful and careful next time. To be always mindful is the pathway of a wise man.' He stopped and considered them with a consoling smile. There was no telling what was then in his mind.

That morning he led them into the village on alms-round as usual. Again that night and the following night there was no meeting for instruction. He only told them to intensify their efforts. They were all greatly relieved at this [for they dared not face him for long moments in the meeting hall].

It was not until the fourth night after the well-digging incident that there was again a meeting as usual. But there was still no mention of what had happened at the well until some time after that when the incident was completely out of everyone's mind, There wasn't one who would have dared tell the Venerable Acharn about it, nor did the Venerable Acharn go to the well, which was some distance from the monastery. Then one day there was an ordinary meeting. He began his instruction, as usual, with the practical aspects of dharma, and later dealt with obedience to one's Acharn.

'Monks should be governed by dharma; not by their impetuous desires. Otherwise, the right path, which leads to their goal of the eradication of suffering, would be lost, and along with it that goal itself. There should be regard for the Dharma and Vinaya [the Law and the Discipline] and the teacher's instructions. They should not be violated. Such a violation is infinitely detrimental to the violator himself and to others as well.

'The soil at that well is not all clay. It is sandy underneath. Digging would only cause the surface clay to collapse and kill the diggers. That was why you were forbidden to dig that well deeper. I had considered all this before not allowing the digging, but there is no need to tell you all the reasons behind my decision; You should have stopped to

consider this matter more heedfully, and that you didn't stop to consider it was more because of your stubbornness than of your lack of understanding. This stubbornness is the stubbornness that one has towards one's parents in childhood and which is carried over to the Acharn. A child's stubborn actions are tolerated and they are pampered, but the same actions from people your age and status should never be tolerated nor should you be pampered. Such actions breed more evil and danger and so deserve more blame. The person who continues in his stubbornness only promotes more evil. Bhikkhus who behave in such a manner should be called "obstinate bhikkhus" and his requisites the "requisites of an obstinate bhikkhu".

'This bhikkhu is stubborn, that one is disobedient - all are defiant. The Acharn then has a band of stubborn and disobedient disciples. Whatever changes into stubbornness is destroyed. The world consumed by stubbornness will break apart, and the Dharma-teaching is certain to collapse.'

Then he asked teasingly, 'Is there anyone here who wants to be an obstinate monk and who wants his Acharn to be the Acharn of obstinate monks? If there is, then tomorrow you can go and dig the well again so that the earth may collapse on you and you may be reborn into a special heaven for stubborn bhikkhus. In all the celestial realms this would really be an outstanding and unique feat. Surely no celestial beings have ever seen such a thing.'

After this harsh admonition, he softened his tone and changed his instruction to a milder topic, showing in gentle expression, but in greater detail, the evils of disobedience and stubbornness. All this time the bhikkhus were stunned and left breathless by this completely unlooked for and unexpected reprimand. After the meeting, when the Venerable Acharn had left, there was a great bustle amongst the bhikkhus, each asking the others who had dared tell him of the incident. All swore, however, that they had never dreamed of doing such a thing. All were too terrified by what had happened at the well to have had the courage to tell the Venerable Acharn about it.

Chastising the Culprits

Ever since his stay in Sarika Cave, the Venerable Acharn's abilities with certain psychic feats, in which he was already well-versed; became so extensive that one could almost say they were without limit. Those bhikkhu disciples staying with him understood very well that they must exercise strict control over their minds, not only during instruction times, but also when not in his presence. Never could they allow their thoughts and minds to run wild. Whenever there was a dharma-meeting, any and all stray thoughts and moods would be there as part of the sermon, and all those 'thinkers' and 'feelers' would find themselves face to face with them again.

The time for explaining dharma was a most important time, and during a pause in the explanation, one could only guess how the Venerable Acharn could detect in an instant any stray or wandering thought. His voice would suddenly change, but never was there any mention of who it was that was doing all the thinking, and this change of voice was usually enough to immediately stop and startle the 'thinker', thus bringing his straying mind back from its dreamland. Following him into a village for alms-food was the same. Any and all vagrant thoughts due to things seen, heard or smelled along the way were sure to be disclosed later in a meeting, but names were never mentioned. Such bhikkhus would then be very much out of countenance, 'heads covered in shame', so to speak.

At such moments, each bhikkhu would glance around at the rest wondering who it was this time that would condescend to thinking such thoughts.

All of his bhikkhu disciples had one trait in common, however, and that was that after being chastised, none were ever angry or hurt. Once out of the 'reformatory hall', they would laugh good humouredly and try to find out who it was. They would never try to conceal their faults. Whoever was responsible would confess, saying 'It was I. I was very foolish and very bold at that moment, even though I knew very well that I would be chastised for it. I allowed myself to be tempted by ... It is surprising how forgetful I was then. I deserved that scolding and it will encourage me to more self-control next time.'

The writer would like to apologize to the reader here for revealing what is not so dignified in the circle of dhutanga bhikkhus who were disciples of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun, but this may perhaps be a lesson to those, be they bhikkhus or lay devotees, who are not yet perfect in mindfulness or self-control. We often have to learn our lessons the hard way due to our many imperfections.

The most likely occasion for dhutanga bhikkhus to meet with injurious sense impressions²⁴ would be when they went into a village for alms-food, which, after all, is a necessary monk's duty. Having met such sense impressions, they sometimes could not help being shaken by them and thus be poisoned by their own uncontrolled thoughts and moods. They would know that what they had allowed to happen [or rather that what they had allowed themselves to think) was wrong, and they would manage to be able to check themselves after that, but it was certain that they would be strongly criticized during the evening instruction time. This would quiet such wild thoughts for a period of time, but sooner or later, when that sense impression was again encountered, the wound that was healing would once again be opened, and, as before, strong 'medicine' would be applied.

In a gathering where there were a number of bhikkhus still imperfect in this respect, they were bound to be susceptible to such sense impressions to a greater or lesser degree. At one time a bhikkhu may be fairly immune, to them through dread of the strong medicine applied by the Venerable Acharn, but at another time he might be less immune and he would then have to be tongue-lashed and cured by the Venerable Acharn's potent remedy. Such was to be expected of minds not absolutely freed from defilements, which at one time or another will go astray.

Indeed, Phra Acharn Mun knew this fact very well and did not wish to exercise his control over his disciples on all occasions. Only in matters which threatened to develop very injuriously did he sternly criticize his bhikkhus in order to check their wild and unruly thoughts. What he wanted their thoughts to dwell upon was the theme of Deliverance and the consequent efforts in that direction. Thus during the evening instruction time, strong medicine was often applied to those who had lost control over their minds that day. Beyond doubt, all this reveals his unique and useful capacity as a dharma instructor, one who was able to read the minds of his disciples to efficiently help and control them for their own benefit and progress. At the least, his abilities stopped them from toying with such injurious thoughts and moods and checked the overgrowth of harmful weeds in

²⁴ From the Pali "visabhaga", which means the sense-impressions arousing lust. This refers to the sight of girls or women in the village who dressed themselves carelessly. In modern times this may be applied to girls who prefer to dress themselves indecently, i.e., deliberately exposing their limbs in such a way as to arouse sexual feeling on the part of men.

their minds, for a thought, be it wholesome or unwholesome, always grows with repetition.

His Experience in Meditation

The Venerable Acharn's instructions to his bhikkhu disciples were especially detailed and profound. The practice of morality was thoroughly explained; the different levels of meditation and wisdom were treated at even greater length and in greater detail. All levels of meditation and wisdom to the intermediate level had been his direct firsthand experience since his stay in Sarika Cave. After staying in the Northeast for some time, his skill became even more developed. He was therefore able to comprehensively explain to all bhikkhus and samaneras under his training and guidance all levels of meditation and wisdom to the intermediate level.

The Venerable Acharn's meditation, be it the elementary level, the intermediate level, or the advanced level, was extraordinary. One moment his meditation would be at the elementary level, in another at the intermediate level and reaching out to pickup messages and events of an almost infinite variety from outside. He would sometimes communicate with invisible beings such as ghosts, demons, nagas, or angels of countless planes. It was this intermediate level of meditation which he used when receiving invisible guests who approached him. At other times the mind would 'separate' itself from the body and tour the celestial realms of various subtleties, from the sensual realms to the very subtle high realms. These tours sometimes would take him to the dark realms where there were beings suffering the results of their own karma.

In describing these realms the words 'up' and 'down' are sometimes employed, but it must be understood that these terms do not mean any vertical travel or change of altitude whatsoever. They instead refer to the degree of subtlety or crudeness, 'up' being an increasing degree of subtlety and 'down' being an increasing degree of crudeness. A parallel may be seen in the world of human beings when we speak of prisoners, some serving a slight short-term punishment and others serving a heavy long-term sentence within the same prison. There is no distinguishing of 'up' or 'down' between both areas for both kinds of prisoners any more than there is any such vertical travel from the celestial realms to the dark realms. There is, however, still a marked difference, for whereas in the world of man those in prison and those outside prison are able to know something about each other, being at least able to know that the other group really exists, those collectively called ghosts and angels, with planes of their own, are invisible and unknown not only to us but also to the other realms, and this despite the cross-currents of minds running through each and every plane of existence.

That these planes are invisible and unknown is due to the ability of each individual mind rather than to the non-existence or non-reality of these planes, be they planes of non-human beings in the realms of woe, the world of human beings, the celestial world called devata, or the higher celestial worlds called brahma. On the other hand, that some people are able to know of their existence and can even tour them is likewise because of their individual development. This therefore necessitates a special ability of mind before the meaning of the terms 'up' and 'down' can be realized firsthand. Such terms are only borrowed from conventional language and then are extended or applied to convey a new, abstract meaning.

The Habit Forming Effect of Meditation

Because his mind was ultra-dynamic and restless, the Venerable Acharn's intermediate level of meditation had been closely connected with his elementary level of meditation. A moment of elementary level meditation was enough to send the mind into the intermediate level, which then would reach out to pick up messages or witness outside events [often, during this period, in spite of himself]. It was not until he was later able to acquire effective control over his mind that he was consequently, at will, able to make use of all levels of meditation in a variety of ways. One moment his mind would enter the elementary level. He would then wish to enter the intermediate level, and after that he would withdraw into the basis of meditation called the unshakable level [appana], resting within its seclusion as long as he liked. This third profound level of meditation is subtle, unshakable, and has within it a peace and bliss that cannot be put into words. The Venerable Acharn said that he had similarly attained to this advanced level of meditation, but that it was through his tendency to use wisdom at all times that he was able to break himself away from its habit-forming effect and was not absorbed in it for long. An aspirant who is sentimentally attached to this advanced level of meditation is retarding his own progress when he becomes self-satisfied and neglects to go further along the path to the development of wisdom. There are many practicing Buddhists whose progress along the path is checked by the delicately addictive effect of the advanced level of meditation, which, because of its blissfulness, is habit-forming. They are tempted to neglect the use of wisdom, taking delight in the cocoon of self-complacency. Without a strong warning from a competent meditation master, they will not be able to release themselves from this confinement, but will conclude that such an attainment is itself surely the Cessation of Suffering, Nirvana.

The one-pointedness of mind which produces this serene poise or balance together with a peaceful bliss at this level of meditation is still rooted in defilements, in the process of becoming, and in birth, as a result of that process. Without the penetrating light of wisdom to dig up these roots, the cycle of rebirths and redeaths cannot be broken. It is thus advisable that meditation at all levels be coupled with wisdom, this being especially true for the advanced level in which wisdom must be most vigorously strengthened to prevent self-delusion.

The Middle Way for the Non-Returner - The Evasive Defilements

On his second journey to the Northeast, the Venerable Acharn was thus profoundly experienced in the intermediate level of wisdom which characterized the third grade of the Noble Disciple, the Non-returner [anagami]. Attainment to this level necessitates the complete achievement of mindfulness of the nature of the body, which transcends both the assumption that the body is attractive or delightful, and the assumption that the body is ugly or repulsive. 'The mind, having separated both extremes [which are similarly emotional] through the development of wisdom, treads the Middle-Path in between, realizing how they are but stepping-stones and thereby being completely detached from them.

This is the minimum requirement for the Non-returner, the passing mark, so to speak. More practice and development, of wisdom is required for the Non-returner to obtain the maximum benefit of this grade of the path. The Non-returner who is able to do so is

entitled to take birth in the fifth plane [akanittha] of the Brahma realm without having to be born in any of the four lower planes.

The Venerable Acharn remained at the level of Non-returner for quite a long time. We learned of this fact from the Venerable Acharn himself. There was no one to offer him any counsel and he had to proceed slowly and very carefully. It was a path he was not as yet accustomed to and there was always the possibility of slipping or of side-stepping at any time. From his experience, he knew that when mindfulness and wisdom become more subtle and developed, realizing deeper dharma, the defilements become correspondingly more subtle and evasive, producing self-delusion more craftily, hiding ever deeper, and being disguised ever more cleverly. It was therefore painful before even one hurdle could be crossed. All obstructions had to be faced courageously and fought resolutely and alone, with no guidance or suggestions expected, save a bit of learning from the scriptures. What painful ordeals he had to undergo whenever he 'pioneered the wilderness'! How much suffering he endured before surviving all those ordeals and coming back to teach us, saving us both time and effort!

The Venerable Acharn would occasionally tell his disciples about the days of his trials and errors, his miseries and privations, his ordeals and near-martyrdom. Twice the writer was moved to tears while listening to how he courageously labored under afflictions, sympathizing with him for his untold sufferings during that time, awed by the profundity of the dharma he had realized. Often the thought occurred to the writer as to whether one could attain to a fraction of his achievement in this lifetime. His narration was truly encouraging, giving the writer renewed courage at a time when courage was needed.

The Venerable Acharn had said that whenever there was an intensification of effort there was simultaneously a weariness of association along with a desire for seclusion. There were a number of disciples under his guidance and training, however, disciples who looked up to him as their master. He therefore had to stay on for a period of time until they, or at least some of them, were able to help themselves to some extent. He knew that his inner development was not yet complete since he had so far only attained to the third level of Enlightenment, there being one more level to develop before final Attainment could be reached.

The Tiger Symphony

- Influence of Pure Loving-Kindness

The Venerable Acharn spent possibly three or four Rains Retreats in the region around the village of Sarm Phong in the district of Sri Songkhram near the town of Nakhorn Phanom. One year was spent in the village of Huay Sai in the district of Khamja-ee near the same town. He preferred the area around the villages of Huay Sai, Khamja-ee, Nongsoong and Khoke Klang, since they were all mountainous regions. Especially in the village of Phakgood, he said, there were many tigers as well as angels who approached him. The angels often came to listen to his sermons during the night while big ferocious tigers were seen roaming freely about his place. These tigers sometimes roared to each other in 'symphony' fashion, and their thundering roars could be heard echoing throughout the forest. Their roars were like human beings calling to each other from a distance. When one tiger roared, another picked it up, and before long the area reverberated with their deafening roars. This terrifying symphony was intermittent, stopping for a time and then beginning again, each 'player' giving his best and loudest performance.

At times, the bhikkhus and samaneras staying with him would not be able to sleep all night, being kept awake by the stifling songs of these forest monarchs. The Venerable Acharn was resourceful in his means of rousing his disciples to action. 'All you lazybones must be wary of the tigers who would like nothing better than to make a meal of such lazy bhikkhus and samaneras. Whoever is afraid of tigers mustn't be afraid of intensifying his effort. Those who intensify their effort will not end up as a tiger's meal.'

At his rousing instructions, his bhikkhus and samaneras would be encouraged and amidst the thundering roars of the tigers, they would brace themselves to do walking meditation, ready to sacrifice their lives despite their palpitating fear.

Their small raised platforms just a few feet above the forest floor would give no protection whatsoever against any ferocious beast. Should any of the forest kings have felt like making a meal of any of them, these bhikkhus and samaneras would have been helpless. The Venerable Acharn's warning was therefore most respectfully obeyed. Sometimes a large tiger would be seen walking about in the bhikkhus area but it did no one any harm. Perhaps it only wished to pass by. The Venerable Acharn knew that no tiger would attack his disciples since the area was always guarded by the angels who came to listen to his sermons. They had offered their protection to him and to all of his disciples in the area, telling him that no harm would come to them. These angels also invited him to stay there as long as possible. His warnings were therefore meant to encourage his disciples and to give them self-confidence. The tigers themselves may have 'sensed' that the area was safe for them as well, that it was a place where they would be able to enjoy peace, not having to be wary or suspicious of anyone. None of the villagers dared to hunt down any game in the area where the Venerable Acharn was dwelling. They said that any such hunting was a great evil and that the gun would explode and kill the hunter.

An area would be infested with ferocious tigers which would often attack the villagers' cows and buffaloes, but when the Venerable Acharn would come and stay in such an area, there would no longer be any such attacks, and no one would know where the tigers had gone to find food. The writer learned of this strange fact both from the Venerable Acharn and from the villagers in several areas where he had stayed.

Another fact no less wonderful was the angels who visited him to receive his teachings. The angel leader said that all of the angels there had been blessed with a special peace and happiness ever since his arrival. The radiance of his loving-kindness seemed to have enveloped both the earth and the sky, being indescribable in its power and wonder. The angel leader also said that wherever he stayed, the angels would be able to feel the radiance of the dharma emitted from his mind. While giving instructions to his bhikkhus and samaneras, his voice thundered in all directions, above, below, and all around, and could be heard from a great distance.

Shortness of Human Life

'If my voice thunders so, can other human beings hear my sermons?' the Venerable Acharn asked.

'How can they hear or know about such things,' the angel leader replied, when their eyes, ears, noses, tongues, bodies and minds are all the time being used in heaping evil

and danger upon themselves? It's a pity that from birth to death they know and understand nothing of the dharma or morality such as they should. Only a few human beings, if any, are interested in the dharma. A human lifespan is so short that even after hundreds of their deaths not one terrestrial angel has died, not to mention a celestial angel or those of the Brahma realms.

'Most human beings are heedless or over-confident. They are charged with safeguarding the Teachings, but they then become ignorant of that Teaching and of morality, which are things of supreme value. Unfortunately, evil men prefer only doing evil, being human only in body. With their last breath they are no longer human [being sub-human and reborn as animals or beings in the realms of woe]. The angels can see all this happening, but yet cannot help them.

'After the death of such an evil person, a chapter of bhikkhus is usually invited to recite the passages from the Abhidhamma beginning with kusala dhamma akusala dhamma ...for his sake. Of what use can this be? How can he listen to it? How can he hear anything? He has already been dragged away by his own evil. Even as a human being he was never interested in listening to any sermons or practicing any morality. Such a recitation or sermon would be of more use to the living, provided they ever give ear to it, but you can see for yourself how many people have ever bothered doing so.'

'No, human beings are not drawn to the Teachings the way they should be. They are instead given to such evils which even animals never do. They are absorbed in these evils all their lives. We invisible beings can know and witness the affairs of men far better than they can ours. An exception is Your Holiness whose power is so wonderful and who is able to know about all beings in all worlds, whether men, animals, or angels. Your wisdom is superior to ours. That is why we all pay homage to you.'

'Since the angels are blessed with clairvoyance and clairaudience and are able to know about good and evil in the affairs of men better than men can themselves,' the Venerable Acharn said, 'isn't there any way to convince them of what is good and to warn them against what is evil? It would seem that the angels would be able to do better than to just let men help themselves.'

'There really isn't any way of helping them,' the angel leader replied. 'There are very few like Your Holiness in the world of human beings. You have radiated the force of loving-kindness to beings in all planes - human, celestial, and even sub-human. How many human beings are there who can know that there, are beings of various kinds in the worlds of various crude and subtle planes? It just isn't possible for humans to listen to beings which have been invisible to them their entire lives. If anything mysterious or extraordinary happened, it would immediately be attributed to the work of ghosts or demons, which would render useless any help which we could give. Men are to be left to their own fate. Even the angels themselves are not yet delivered from suffering. Otherwise they would already have attained to Nirvana.'

Attitude of Angels Towards Human Beings

'Do angels have to experience suffering as do other beings? Do they also know how they will be able to attain to Nirvana when they have exhausted their karma?' the Venerable Acharn asked.

'All those who become Buddhas and who teach the world teach only the getting rid of suffering and the attaining to Nirvana,' the angel leader replied. 'They do not teach how to live buried under a heap of suffering. It is very noticeable that human beings most often turn a deaf ear to the doctrine of Nirvana since they are still absorbed in their own playthings. The angels, however having heard the doctrine of Nirvana from many a Buddha, have it enshrined in their hearts, but they are not yet freed from the karma which binds them to their angel realms, and thus cannot yet go beyond the cycle of births and deaths. As long as there is a grain of karma in any being, so long will there be some degree of suffering. This depends upon the nature of the karma.'

'Are there many human beings who have the ability to communicate with the angels?' the Venerable Acharn asked. 'There are some,' the angel leader replied, 'but not so many. Most of them are bhikkhus dwelling in the seclusion of the wilds, possessing an inner development akin to that of Your Holiness. There are also some lay devotees who can do so, but they are even fewer in number than the bhikkhus. These lay devotees are devoted to the practice of the dharma and have purified their minds. Otherwise they could not know or see angel bodies, which, although crude and visible to other angels living in the same plane, are so subtle as to be invisible to ordinary human eyes.'

'Is the smell of a human body repugnant and offensive to you? You come to see me very often and yet are not repulsed by the offensive smell of my body. Why is this?'

'A human being whose life is sustained by dharma is never repulsive to us,' the angel leader replied. 'Such a person emits a fragrant odor inspiring a reverential respect which draws us to him at all times. Never are we tired of coming to see such a person and listening to his instructions.'

'The smell of an evil human being who shuns the Teachings and morality is sickening. Such people are blind to the value of the dharma which is supreme in all the Three Realms. Their bodies give out a most putrid and evil stench. No angel would ever think of associating with the likes of them.'

The Venerable Acharn's narration concerning invisible beings never failed to capture the attention of his disciples, making them oblivious to the passage of time and fatigue. Often they would desire to be able to do likewise and would actually make the necessary efforts to do as he had done. Whenever the Venerable Acharn recalled the events of his own previous lives or those of others which would serve as moral lessons, there was again a burning desire to know one's own past until the fundamental goal of the Cessation of Suffering would be temporarily forgotten. Only through mindfulness and wisdom could one stop the wild and morbid desire to put the 'bygones' before the goal of Deliverance. Records of the past can send a person into madness should he allow himself to become engrossed in such dramas, which, however thrilling, should not be re-enacted. Hence the importance of self-restraint or mindfulness coupled with wisdom.

The Nature of Invisible Beings

When Phra Acharn Mun would tell his disciples of the visits of invisible beings, it would be very interesting to listen to, especially about those groups which are similar to human beings. He told of one group in particular which was very much like a society of human beings. Ghosts and demons were of two kinds, those who were evil-natured and those who were good-natured. If we compared these evil-natured ones to our world, they

would be called hooligans. Those who were given to violence and who were disturbers of the peace had to be confined in what we would call a prison. They were classified by their sex and by the nature of their crimes, each being put into cells crowded with those of the same particular kind. There were therefore cells for male hooligan ghosts and for female hooligan ghosts, and there were more cells for hooligans given to serious crimes and to crimes of violence. One look at their features was enough to show that they would not be susceptible to any ray of loving-kindness whatsoever.

Like human beings, these ghosts had a town of their own. This particular town was quite large, and, as with other ghost towns, it had a leader to watch over it. There were also quite a number of good-natured ghosts inclined to meritorious deeds. This kind of ghost is respected by both the ordinary and hooligan ghosts because of their great store of merit. The fear and respect found in this realm are due to the law of nature, not because of intended flattery of feigned respect.

The Venerable Acharn said that the truth of evil being less powerful than good was also confirmed here in the world of ghosts. Those ghosts who had a great store of merit were born as ghosts through an unwholesome karma intervening for a brief period. It was their true nature which was more good than evil, however, which enabled them to control a great number of ghosts less fortunate than they. There is no favoritism in the world of ghosts for the simple reason that there cannot be. The determining factor of superiority is individual karma. No other artificial rules, as can be found in the world of men, can exist there - only the law of karma reigns supreme. Human laws of rank, heredity, birth, appointment, etc., exist here in this world of ours and end here. What the Venerable Acharn told about this town was more detailed than this but the writer cannot remember all of what he said.

The Venerable Acharn would visit the land of ghosts during his meditation sitting, and like human beings, when they saw the Venerable Acharn, they would shout to each other and stream out to pay him homage. He would walk through their streets accompanied by their leader, who showed him profound respect. Their leader explained to him that the reason these hooligan ghosts had been put into confinement was to prevent them from always disturbing and molesting others. He went on to say that human beings called them 'ghosts' and 'demons' [and associate with such names everything fearful and loathsome], but said that they were in reality just another kind of sentient being like any other dwelling in any other plane.

To Ubol Rajathani

Now that the Venerable Acharn had stayed in the town of Nakhorn Phanom and had undertaken to instruct and train other bhikkhus and samaneras for a length of time, he could not help thinking of his own inner development, which had not yet reached the point of finality. It was this which made him realize that his strength was still not adequate for shouldering such a great burden. His helping of others had delayed his own development. In his evaluation of his practice since the second time he had come from the central part of the country, he had observed that there had been little progress from his efforts. Another period of absolute seclusion was necessary if final Attainment was to be reached. Once having reached his goal, there would need be no more concern over it and he would then be able to devote himself completely to helping others towards that same Attainment.

The Venerable Acharn had had his mother ordained [as a white-robed nun] and she had been staying with him these past six years. He could not help feeling concern for her and he thus had to postpone 'his' seclusion journey'. He finally decided to put her up in the town of Ubol Rajathani, to which proposal she readily agreed. He made his way to Ubol Rajathani via the short-cut leading through the mountains of the districts of Nong Soong and Kamja-ee. He emerged at the district of Derng Noktha near Nakhorn Phanom. He was accompanied by his mother and a large number of bhikkhus and samaneras. He spent the Retreat that year in the village of Nong Khorn, in the district of Amnard Jaroen, the town of Ubol Rajathani, along with a large number of bhikkhus and samaneras. During that Rains Retreat, he devoted his time to instructing both lay devotees and bhikkhus and samaneras. The result was that more people were greatly impressed by his sermons, committing themselves to his guidance and training.

A Vision of Various Kinds of Disciples

Late one night he was engaged in meditation. When his mind withdrew into one-pointedness, he saw a vision of bhikkhus and samaneras walking with him. A number of them were quietly following him in a manner which was both orderly and respectful, beautiful and impressive. But there were some who had overtaken him, walking shamelessly before him, hurriedly and without self-restraint. And there were still others who were scurrying in their attempts to overtake him, caring nothing about the modesty and manner to be expected of a recluse. Then there were a number who carried pieces of wood which they used like pincers to tightly grip his chest so that he almost couldn't breathe. This was a prophetic vision, which he contemplated and interpreted as follows:

The first group of bhikkhus and samaneras who followed him in an orderly and self-controlled way were those who obeyed his instructions with reverential respect and who would later on help maintain and preserve the Buddha's dispensation for posterity. They would also be able to safeguard the traditions of the Noble Practice and would be revered by both gods and men. Those who had overtaken him and who had proudly walked in front without self-control were those who regarded themselves as superior to him and who then neglected to do what was reasonably expected of them. They would do what was detrimental to both themselves and others involved, and they would do what was contradictory to the Buddha's dispensation and thus spread evil like poison. The disciples who were scurrying in their attempts to overtake him were those who, like the former group, were beginning to stray from the Path and who would later help the other group in bringing ruin to the Buddha's teaching. The last group gripping his chest with pincer-like pieces of wood, due to their negligence of practice in mental development, had turned to evil ways, even to the point of turning against their own teacher.

Concerning this latter group, Phra Acharn Mun said that he knew them personally by name. They were his former disciples who were now spending the Rains Retreat in another place some distance away, for which he had given his permission. They had obeyed him, and in fact, had had a profound respect for him and thus should not have been shown as doing such things in the vision. He did not mention this prophetic vision to anyone, but from that time on he began to closely observe the behaviour of his disciples.

It was only a few days later that the latter part of his vision became a reality, just as he had interpreted it. He was visited by the governor of that province, who approached

him together with a number of government officials and two bhikkhus, one of whom was an Acharn, in his own right and who was one of the Venerable Acharn's disciples. More importantly, he was the leader of the group in the vision which was trying to do him in. The purpose of their visit was not for seeking dharma as others had done, but to seek his cooperation in asking people to contribute money towards the construction of two or three schools for children. They knew how much he was respected by the people and how, with his cooperation, they could obtain a large sum of money.

[It must be noted here that all these were things which he had never done and which he would never do - being involved in construction work and asking for money from the people - since he was a bhikkhu]. Having learned of the purpose of their visit, he realized that these two bhikkhus had, in his vision, tried to physically harm him. He later called the two of them to see him and instructed them in what are and what are not the duties and responsibilities of a recluse [who must strive for nothing else but mind-development and insight], and who is not to behave as they had. He did this so that they would be more self-controlled and mindful of what was to be expected of them as recluses.

This story is told here as an illustration of how powerful the mind which has been trained and purified is. Such a mind is able to know what is concealed as well as what is openly revealed, what will happen in the future as well as what is taking place and what has already occurred. This episode is indicative of a trained and purified mind being the dharma itself and having no thoughts directed towards secular gains. The Venerable Acharn's words were therefore like his mind, purified from all falsehood. They were the expressions of insight and wisdom and never meant to cause others any harm.

The above story is the account as it was given to the circle of the Venerable Acharn's close disciples, and should there be anything inappropriate in disclosing it, the writer hereby asks for the reader's forgiveness.

His Discipline as Enforced on Thoughts - Two Kinds of Disciples

The accounts relating to Phra Acharn Mun's life and versatile capabilities, especially those psychic or so-called supernatural abilities; are noteworthy in these practical, modern times of Buddhism, such abilities being both wonderful and unique. His way of life and his method of teaching were no less remarkable and unique.

In teaching, he would at times speak directly, while at other times he would mention incidents tacitly, in both their wholesome and unwholesome aspects. Ever since what had happened at Sarika Cave, with the aged bhikkhu, the Venerable Acharn was more careful in criticizing other's thoughts, and this despite the fact that in his capacity as instructor and trainer he genuinely wished to help the person toying with such harmful thoughts. Trying to help such a person, however, telling him directly how such a thought was wrong and harmful to himself, sometimes, ironically, did more harm than good. The person warned was not always able to take advantage of that warning, being deeply hurt instead and completely misunderstanding the intention. Even when such a warning was given indirectly, without a name being mentioned, the person still felt himself consumed and found it intolerable. A well-intended warning or suggestion must be given very carefully and with serious consideration given to the particular circumstances and

the person in question. Another example of intended harm is that which the opposite sex presents to bhikkhus and other practicing Buddhists, and this too without their knowing it.

This was the theme of instruction most often given by the Venerable Acharn, both directly and indirectly, so as at least to prevent the weedy overgrowth of such thoughts. Other kinds of thoughts, although inappropriate and unwholesome, were less harmful and were at times skipped over.

The instruction hour was a most important time in which there had to be absolute order and calm on the part of both the instructor and the listeners in order to reap the full benefit of the instruction being given. Should there be anyone who dared toy with an unskillful, harmful thought at that time, the 'thunderbolt' would strike abruptly, and the 'daredevil' would be petrified with fear and all others would be left trembling nervously. Names were rarely mentioned, but just having that thought exposed to all in the meeting was enough to make that daredevil's blood run cold.

This kind of thunderbolt was the most effective brake upon naughty, stray thoughts, and it could act as an accelerator towards strengthening mindfulness or self-control. There were those who were able to withdraw completely into the state of one-pointedness, and there were others who were considerably calmed down when their straying thoughts were thus checked. In this way his listeners were forced to exercise their self-control, or more precisely, thought control, to the best of their ability. If they did not do so, the thunderbolt would suddenly strike, or, like straying chickens, they would be swooped down on by a sharp-eyed falcon. It was because of this special ability of his that those who were able to withstand his rigorous discipline, enforced on thoughts and moods as well as words and deeds, were later firmly established in mind-development. The longer they stayed with him, the more absorbed they became with his mode of practice and his profundity of attainment.

There were a number of disciples who subjected themselves to his training, being like ragged or torn pieces of cloth which the Venerable Acharn had to clean and mend, and who always extracted lessons from his instructions and suggestions, whether collectively or individually given, and they never neglected to observe and comply with his way of practice. These heedful and steadfast disciples never failed to steadily advance until they were firmly established in inner development. On the other hand, there were others who did not benefit by his association or his advice. They put outward happenings before inner results, being, for example, worried about being scolded because of their own uncontrollable thoughts and then being terrified when actually scolded. Such people did not try to rectify themselves, but were overwhelmed by nervous apprehension and fright, forgetting the fact that his scolding and his seemingly cruel treatment were meant only for their own improvement and attainment, not his.

This latter group still carried with them their former way of life, thought, speech, etc. Even under his guidance, they never dropped their former habits, and they never absorbed or tasted anything of his. At their departure, they left as they had come, with no change for the better, but perhaps a change for the worse. Such people were untrainable and incorrigible. No matter how long they stayed with him, one thing was clear, they were like ladles submerged in a delicious curry, knowing nothing of its delicious taste. And like a ladle thrown into one pot after another, those who never think of improving themselves through mind-development are thrown without end into various kinds of suffering. The 'throwers' are nothing but their own defilements: desire, aversions, attachment, and ignorance.

A Lone Bull Elephant in the Wilds

During that dry season, the Venerable Acharn took his mother to her home village, sometimes resting one night and at other times a few nights in each place. It was not a hurried journey, and by gradual stages they finally reached their destination. He stayed there for a suitable length of time, instructing his mother and other lay devotees, delighting them all with his sermons and instructions. He then took leave of his mother and other relatives and set out on his wanderings, heading down towards the central part of Thailand. This was a real dhutanga journey, traveling alone and with no need to hurry. At a village or a place where there was food and water in abundance, he would stop for the night, opening his klod [dhutanga umbrella] and hanging it in the shade of a tree. He would then stay there a few days developing his meditation and insight, and, being sufficiently refreshed, would continue his journey on foot, for such was the only way of travel in most places at that time when transport was mainly by railway, highways still being few.

For a dhutanga bhikkhu, there is no haste since for him there is no 'time' in the sense of the scurry and scramble of town life. His main purpose is insight meditation. Walking the whole day was developing insight meditation the whole day. Phra Acharn Mun's dhutanga journey this time was like that of a lone bull elephant wandering in the wilds. Such isolation was at all times blessed with quietude and relief, all burdens being unloaded and all thorns pulled from the heart. There was lightness and buoyancy of body and mind. While the body was ambling through the scorching meadows interspersed with forested areas, the mind was absorbed in the theme of meditation, oblivious to the heat of the noonday sun. Any environment created a spiritual atmosphere which was at once refreshing and serene. He carried on his shoulder his alms-bowl in its bag and his klod. Robes which were not being worn, his water filter, needles, thread and other requisites were kept within the alms-bowl. The water kettle was carried by hand. All these sizable and weighty items went unnoticed by the mind. Such a body and mind, freed from worry, now experienced the joys of isolation, being exhilaratingly light like a wisp of cotton floating on the wind. He had fulfilled his duty towards his mother, establishing her firmly in inner development. There was now no other responsibility, except self-development to the point of finality. This thought served as a warning to him walking leisurely along the lone trail through solitary terrain.

After a long while walking in the scorching heat, he would sometimes come across some leafy trees by the wayside which would invite a pause. There he would seat himself in the shade with his mind fixed upon the theme for insight meditation until he felt refreshed and ready to continue the journey. It would now be afternoon, the heat would be less intense and he would walk on, with the self-control of one whose sole purpose was to deliver himself from the Wheel of Suffering. Being thus mindful and self-possessed, he would later reach a small isolated village in the forest. Such a village would be enough for a dhutanga bhikkhu, since he eats only to maintain the life of the body, never to please the palate or to beautify the complexion. Having marked the location of the village, he would look for a suitable place, preferably some distance away from it, where he might rest for the night. The next morning he would go into the village for alms-food, and having partaken of his meal, would continue his journey.

In this way he traveled from one place of seclusion to another, walking by day until approaching a village, and then stopping for a rest at night. A journey such as this was

the usual, uneventful kind. But there were times when a dhutanga bhikkhu lost his way in the forest or when a full day's walk ended with no village to be seen, nor even a water-hole to quench a parching thirst. In some worse cases, dhutanga bhikkhus were known to have walked for days without food and water and almost without sleep. But the mind absorbed in dharma can make the body endure more suffering and difficulties than if it relies on, and is therefore enslaved by material supplies alone. He would stay for a few days in a place suitable enough for mind-development, whereas in other places which were not suitable, he would rest for one night and continue his journey the following day.

In the forest of Dong Phya Yen²⁵ situated between the towns of Saraburi and Nakhorn Rajasima, Phra Acharn Mun said he was moved to rapturous delight by the beauty of its mountain scenery. Here he spent a longer time developing insight meditation and drinking to his heart's content of the unearthly beauty of the forest.

The forest abounded in animals of all kinds, gentle and ferocious, herbivorous and carnivorous, big and small, living in trees and on the ground. Often he came face to face with them, but they seemed to take little interest in him. This forest was really wild, with small villages spaced very great distances apart, each village consisting of only a few houses. The people were forest-dwellers, who made their living by cultivating rice and other farm crops. They lived alongside hills and mountains. It was these people who helped sustain him with alms-food during his journey through the forests. The villagers there were pious people. They were also hunters since the area abounded in wild animals of all kinds. His stay with them was very comfortable since they did not disturb his peace by coming often to see him. Each respected the privacy of the other, realizing that each had his own duties to fulfill.

From the Dong Phya Yen forest, he continued his journey southwards, finally reaching Bangkok, where he stayed at Wat Pathoomwan.

In Bangkok And Then to Chiangmai

The Venerable Acharn journeyed between Bangkok and the Northeast several times. Sometimes he went by train, which at that time did not go as far as it does today, and at other times he walked both ways. During the Rains Retreat he spent at Wat Patboomwan, he often went to study dharma with his eminence the Venerable Phra Upali Gunupamacariya of Wat Borom Nivas.

After the Retreat, in the dry season, his eminence planned to go to Chiangmai, and he invited Phra Acharn Mun to accompany him. On the train Phra Acharn Mun withdrew into meditation for most of the trip; with a brief period of sleep on the first leg of the journey.

It was at the town of Uttaradit, the gateway to the mountain area, that he decided to withdraw into a meditative state from there to a place near Chiangmai. About twenty minutes later, his mind was sufficiently calmed to reach the 'base of samadhi', which is

²⁵ This forest was formerly well-known for its vast area inhabited by wild, ferocious beasts and infested with malaria, which in fact was no less ferocious than the beasts. Now this forest has been cleared and most of the trees felled. 'Bald-headed' mountains can be seen all over the area. Gone with the malaria and the wild beasts are the forests, the fertility, the humidity, and the beauty of the mountain scenery.

complete, unshakable one-pointedness. In this state there was no knowing of anything about the train or outside environment, be it the rattling sound of the train or the passengers; no knowing of thoughts or emotions, or even his own body. There was only the profound stage of concentration enveloping the mind. It was when they had almost reached the town of Chiangmai that his mind emerged from this lofty state. He opened his eyes to see the buildings and hear the bustle of Chiangmai all around him. He got up from his seat and was collecting his requisites when, looking up for a moment, he saw the passengers in the same coach staring at him in curiosity and wonder. It seemed all eyes there, including those of the railway officials, were focused on him, wide with surprise. Just then the railroad guards seemingly coming from nowhere, swarmed about him and smilingly offered to carry his requisites. The railway officials and the other passengers stood staring at him until he was out of sight.

Earlier there had been a number of passengers and railway guards who had asked him which monastery he came from and where he was planning to go. He told them he was a bhikkhu living in the forest and that did not stay permanently in any monastery. He also added that he would like to find a secluded place in the mountains or forests near the town. Considerately, they asked him in which monastery he was going to stay and whether there would be anyone taking him. He thanked them for their kindness and replied that he was to be accompanied by his eminence the Venerable Phra Upali Gunapamacariya and that there would be some people who would come to help him. His eminence was well-known in that town and was highly respected by all the people there, from the governor on down to businessmen and the townspeople.

Thus there were a great many people welcoming him at the railway station. There were even a number of motor-cars, which were still rare still those days. Those who welcomed him invited Phra Upali to the monastery of Chedi Luang. Here they gathered to visit with him and to listen to his sermon.

Sermon at Chiangmai

On this occasion, his eminence Phra Upali generously invited Phra Acharn Mun to deliver a sermon to the people who had gathered there. His sermon was most impressive, delighting all his listeners, and when it had ended, all wished it had not.

'The theme of his sermon that day was Amupubbikatha, the series of progressively important practices [consisting of generosity, morality, birth in heaven, the evils of sensual pleasure and the benefits of renunciation. These are followed by the Four Noble Truths.] After the sermon, he paid his respects to his eminence and returned to his hut to have a rest. In the midst of the gathering, his eminence openly praised the sermon, saying that it was so beautifully delivered that there was hardly any equal to it. He said that that sermon should have been called muttodaya - leading the listeners to the Dawn of Deliverance. It was explained in so great a detail that he [his eminence] would not have been able to make it as remarkably unique, yet so delightful and inspiring.

'What this dhutanga bhikkhu has said and his manner of speaking are quite wonderful,' said his eminence. 'He has given us a valuable instruction and has aroused in his listeners an insatiable desire for higher and still higher dharma. [His sermon has dealt with what we tend to overlook the significance of, we having taken it for granted]. He makes us wonder why we hadn't ever thought of these things before he brought them to our attention. The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun is obviously a kammattana bhikkhu [a monk

who practices mind-development], one who follows the Buddha's Path with mindfulness and wisdom. He does not overlook the dharma or abuse it, as is the case with many other bhikkhus and lay people. He does not speak monotonously, but emphasizes points of special significance, and clarifies that which is difficult to understand, explaining these points in detail and making them clear to his listeners. He is resourceful and his preaching can hardly be equaled. I am his teacher, but I am no match for him in this respect. There are many, many things which I cannot clarify, but which he can. I seek his counsel and advice for that which I am not clear about; and his suggestions have never failed to satisfy me. I have forgotten many valuable lessons from him.

Phra Acharn Mun accepted my invitation to come to Chiangmai, possibly because he saw that it was a mountainous town with forests suitable for his secluded wanderings. He is a bhikkhu of rare qualities. Although I am his elder, yet I genuinely respect his qualities, and he is so humble towards me that sometimes I cannot help feeling embarrassed. He will stay here only for a time and then he will set out on a journey. I cannot dissuade him, for his sole aim is to find the highest truth. All I can do is appreciate his selfless purpose so that he may be able to more efficiently help bhikkhus and lay disciples in the near future. Anyone interested in the practice of mind-development can go to see him; you will not be disappointed. But one, thing you must bear in mind: do not trouble him with superstition and mysticism. He will reprimand you for such silly things. He preaches and practices only the dharma of the Buddha and will not lead people astray.

'I have discussed dharma with him and have been convinced of wonderful facts that nowadays cannot be learned from others. I admire Phra Acharn Mun and greatly respect him, although I do not tell him so, but I am sure he is really worthy of such respect, being as he is a Noble Disciple in the best sense of the term. He has never mentioned anything about this himself, but during an informal conversation when there is no other person listening, from his able, lucid and comprehensive explanations, it is evident that he must have established himself in the Third-Fruition [anagami - Non-returner]. All that he has explained and clarified is in complete accordance with what is said in the Scripture. He is humble and respectful to me at all times and has never shown any sign of disrespect or any aggressive attitude. From his demeanour one might suppose he is but a worthless rag. The impression he has made on me is deep and reverent.'

The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun was unknown to the people gathered there. The Venerable Upali, after the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun had finished his sermon, told the people gathered there something about him, and at the same time used that opportunity to compliment him. The Venerable Acharn himself was not present, but had already returned to his hut. Some bhikkhus who were present in that gathering told him what the Venerable Upali had said and he in turn told it to his circle of disciples. A small book distributed on the occasion of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun's funeral, which contained a short biography and his teachings, was called Muttodaya [The Dawn of Deliverance] from the appellation given his sermon by the Venerable Upali on this occasion.

The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun was known to have stayed in the wilds of Chiangmai for eleven years [from B.E. 2472 to 2483, C.E. 1929 to 1940), after which time he went to the town of Udorn Thani in compliance with an invitation by his eminence the Venerable Phra Dhammacetiya of Wat Bodhisomphorn. This will be dealt with below.

Showdown

The Fight for Full Final Attainment

Having stayed at Wat Chedi Luang in Chiangmai for a time, he took leave of the Venerable Upali and set out on his dhutanga wanderings for a place of seclusion in the forest and mountain area of that town. He traveled alone, his best opportunity now to intensify the effort so long suspended due to his helping others. There was now nothing to divide his attention and so delay his effort. The secluded places where he stayed at that time included the forest and mountain areas in the districts of Mae Rim and Chieng Dao, among others, and he stayed there in both the rainy and the dry seasons. This was to be a showdown, resulting in either death or achievement. He had devoted sufficient time to helping others. Now it was time for self-development for the sake of self-perfection. The way of life associated with others is beset with sufferings and burdens. Only through mindfulness and wisdom can such a load be alleviated to some extent. The burden, however, is still there, to counteract and minimize the results of exertion.

The Venerable Acharn was now a solitary man in a solitary place where the original cause of 'becoming', birth and other sufferings would be faced and fought to the finish. The mind that is still worrying about other things or people is like a ship overloaded with cargo and soon doomed to a watery grave. For such a mind, no hope for the Cessation of Suffering can be expected. Whatever loving-kindness there is towards others must cease for the time being. When the Final Goal is being attained, loving-kindness for others must die away, for it will interfere with the attainment of that Goal itself. As a follower of the Buddha, who is unexcelled in exertion, it is imperative to study means and methods so that the Path may be dutifully followed. Once self-development is perfected, others can be much more effectively helped.

The time had now arrived for the pitched battle between the defilements and the way of practice. All this time the mind had been torn between its two suitors [defilements and dharma], and now one of them would become the sole possessor of the mind. If exertion were lacking and wisdom not enough, the mind would be at the mercy of the defilements, which would be sure to drive it to untold sufferings in the cycle of rebirths and deaths. But if exertion and wisdom were sufficiently developed, the mind would become the dharma and the dharma would belong absolutely to him as his invaluable treasure. It was time to strike a decisive blow against the defilements, with no thought given to life or death. If victory could not be gained, let the body die in the attempt. There was to be no life for the defeated, for that would be shameful and sure to be ridiculed by the defilements.

Such was how Phra Acharn Mun cautioned and encouraged himself from time to time during his solitary stay in the wilds of Chiangmai. His life there was strictly controlled by a fixed, inflexible timetable of all-round, all-time exertion, day and night, every movement of body and every moment of mind. All this time mindfulness and wisdom revolved continually, checking and contemplating every contact outside and every ripple within. Nothing, absolutely nothing, was allowed to penetrate the defense line of mindfulness and wisdom, which had now reached the level of Dhammacakka [The Wheel of Dharma], being automatic, spontaneous and uninterrupted.

'This episode of his struggle, when the Venerable Acharn later narrated it, left his listeners awe-struck and breathless. They were all petrified by the account of his manly and lonely struggle there in the wilds with no help or encouragement expected from anyone or

anything but his own exertion. So wonderful and awe-inspiring was it that his listeners felt as if a door had been opened to them through which they could attain to Nirvana. And in the actual moments of this episode itself, he was heading towards that attainment at full speed.

Great-Mindfulness and Great-Wisdom

The Venerable Acharn said that his mind had long been fully established in the Third Fruition [Non-returner], but due to the responsibilities of preaching and training disciples, there had been no time for him to continue his exertion for full final Attainment. He was fulfilled when he wandered alone in the wilds of Chiangmai this time, and with several bonuses. The environment and atmosphere were remarkably favorable, the health of the body and mind was buoyant, being ready to support any degree of exertion; and the mind was alert and prepared. The Supreme Dharma seemed ready to dawn very soon, with the Cessation of Suffering not far away. The battle was then drawing to a close, with the strong hound of dharma driving the cunning fox of defilements into a corner. The defilements, now enfeebled and at bay, awaited only the end, when the hound of dharma would spring upon and finish them. Even though it was not yet the end of the battle, the outcome was irreversible.

At this stage of development, the mind is unfailingly equipped with what may be called great-mindfulness [mahasati] and great wisdom [mahapanna] which do not fade or fail in their function, even without any deliberate effort to control them. Being automatic, spontaneous and uninterrupted, great-mindfulness and great wisdom operate promptly in dealing with external and internal circumstances. Everything is checked and contemplated and then detached from, everything being left where it belongs. This is noticeably different from the early stages of development when mindfulness and wisdom must be deliberately cultivated and controlled. [And even with much effort, its progress is very much like the progress in the children's game of 'Snakes-and-Ladders', at one time seeming to move ahead rapidly by leaps and bounds, then at another time being hurled down through the 'snake-pit' to where the game had started a long time ago.] The orders to do or not do this or that, the knowledge and reasons which contemplate this or that for this or that reasons, and the means of how to deal properly with this or that, all are embedded as part and parcel of great-mindfulness and great-wisdom. No conscious effort is necessary for their occurrence, since, except during sleep, they function every moment of the day and night, being very much like water steadily seeping into a waterhole so that it never runs dry.

The conditioners of sensation, perception or memory, mental formations, and consciousness are what are contemplated and they serve as the targets, the nature of which the arrow of mindfulness-and-wisdom penetrates. The aggregate of materiality has lost its significance as a theme of contemplation because of having attained to the stage of Non-returner. These four incorporeal aggregates must be extensively and thoroughly contemplated as to their arising, staying, and fading away, all supported on the base of anatta [not self], being devoid of an abiding entity behind the so called 'man', 'woman', or 'animal'. To repeat, there is no 'man', 'woman', 'animal', 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', 'they' or anyone in any of the four incorporeal aggregates [let alone the crude corporeal aggregate of the body]. Realization of this truth must be accomplished through insight or wisdom and not merely through memory or intellectual knowledge. Both levels of knowledge, it must be remembered, are poles apart, being as far from each other as the earth is from the sky.

Recognition through memory [intellectual level] tends to inflate the ego, stimulate emotions, distract the mind and increase self-delusion. Evidence of this fact can be seen in many a dharma discussion which are marked by petty quarrelling, fault-finding and the shooting of verbal bullets. Ironically, all this serves to embrace defilements, not to abandon them. The aim of a dharma discussion should be the abandonment of defilements. Recognition of this truth through the development of wisdom in the best sense of the term would result in defilements, gross and subtle, being subdued, reduced or removed, depending on the degree of wisdom developed.

Since there are no defilements that can hide themselves from the searching eye of wisdom which is fully developed, wisdom, or rather mindfulness-and-wisdom, is the most efficient weapon by which to destroy all defilements. It was through wisdom that the Buddha and his Noble Disciples were able to attain to Enlightenment. Never has it been possible through perception or memory, which is but, intellectual knowledge, inference, speculation. This is not to say that perception or memory are useless, for they are helpful as a guideline in the early stages of development, but even in the early stages care must be taken not to let them be mistaken for the truth itself.

The proclamation of the truth to the world by the Buddha or by his Noble Disciples has always been done through the development of wisdom and not merely perception or memory. It is therefore of paramount importance for practicing Buddhists to be always wary of memory, to never take it for wisdom. Recognition through perception, it must be remembered, never results in the reduction of any defilements, nor are the defilements subdued, not to mention actually removed by it. The mind overwhelmed by memory is still overwhelmed, as before, by defilements.

There is a Thai saying which says that 'a mountain of knowledge, instead, of lifting a man up, can weigh him down'. It was for the purpose of developing wisdom that the Buddha dissuaded the Kalama people from belief in a teacher or doctrine through speculation, inference, rumor, etc. He advised them to acquire a firsthand realization of the truth so that they would be able to know by themselves [through wisdom] that this was good and that was evil. Such knowledge is self-evident, requiring no inference logic, or others' words of guarantee. For the Buddha and his Noble Disciples there was no need to look to anyone as a guarantor or to confirm their knowledge. It is this characteristic of the dharma called sandiitthiko [being self-evident] that was their most reliable guarantor.

The Venerable Acharn said that this stage of practice was absorbing and delightful. There was no desire for food or for sleep. There was no feeling of tiredness or fatigue day after day, night after night. The mind put up a continuous fight against the defilements without any hesitation or apprehension whatsoever. He wasted no time, which, in the solitary life, now belonged to him completely.

Not long after leaving Wat Chedi Luang, the Venerable Acharn arrived at a large marsh by the name of Nong Auh. [the word 'auh' in 'Thai is an exclamation of pleasant surprise, suggesting a sudden disillusionment after a series of trials and errors]. Here his mind began to display its powers in a pompous and spectacular manner; like a well-trained and spirited horse. It soared upwards and dove downwards; it reached out to pick up messages and to witness scenes and events in all planes of consciousness, and then withdrew to tear up defilements within, roots and all. This was the power and strength pent-up during the long period of confinement while being responsible for others. The mind had been imprisoned in the mundane world with all of its traditions, and now, once

the door had been opened, its potential powers were let loose. The force of mindfulness and wisdom became intensely active and dynamic. It flashed out to observe the Three Realms, then darted back to look inside. It functioned full-strength in all respects, now giving up, now letting go and putting down, again cutting, crushing and piercing into whatever falsities remained.

Like a large fish with great strength in the ocean, it dove, swooped and performed all sorts of acrobatic feats with gaiety and delight. Looking backwards, the mind saw looming on the horizon the black clouds of evils and dangers threateningly accumulating, urging it to strive for Deliverance at all costs. Gazing ahead it beheld the glory and brilliance of the light which seemed to beckon to him to enjoy an unlimited treasure of knowledge.

The Venerable Acharn related much more concerning this most important episode of his life, but it is not possible to repeat all that he has said in these pages.

His Full-Final Attainment

It was not long after he had put forth his utmost effort, with the support of great-mindfulness and great-wisdom working unflinching and continually, that late one night he was seated absorbed in contemplation on top of a large, flat rock under the leafy branches of a lone tree, by the side of a mountain. All around this tree was a clearing, and there was a gentle breeze adding coolness and comfort to the silence of the scene. It was a place where he occasionally used to sit during the day. Unfortunately, the writer does not know its exact location, having forgotten to take note of the name of the tree, or of the mountain, or even of the district in question. The mind was drinking in the taste of his account to such an extent that the details have been forgotten. Even several days after its telling, the wonders of his story did not fade away. The writer also felt self-pity, brooding over whether or not such an attainment would be possible for oneself. At that time it never entered the writer's mind that one day an attempt would be made to record the Venerable Acharn's life, as is being done at present.

From evening to late that night, the Venerable Acharn contemplated the Law of Dependent Origination²⁶, both during walking meditation and sitting meditation, in both its serial and reverse order, backwards and forwards again and again, traversing and re-traversing the great domain where ignorance and desire have been massing to create various aspects of suffering within the mind. This was the most critical point of the battle between the Venerable Acharn, who struck with the death-dealing weapon of great-mindfulness and great-wisdom, and ignorance, which is renowned for its most skilful tactics. Ignorance, is clever, not only in its defensive maneuvers, whereby it is adroitly, evasive, but also in aggressive strategy, whereby it can launch a surprise attack on its opponent with devastating results. And that, of course, is to be expected of one who has been reigning over the Great Kingdom of Rebirths and Redeaths from time immemorial, with the minds of sentient beings within its powerful grip. But in the life-and-death struggle with the Venerable Acharn that night, the powerful and crafty monarch of the Three Realms was helplessly dethroned. He was toppled and fell before the relentless strikes of the great weapon of great-mindfulness and great-wisdom. His heretofore unchallenged authority [in the case of other worldlings] was challenged by the Venerable Acharn, and he was finally and absolutely defeated.

²⁶ See supplementary notes.

According to the Venerable Acharn's narration, the worlds at that time seemed to tremble with awe and wonder. In various celestial realms the angels thundered out their whole-hearted appreciation, exclaiming that there had now occurred in the world another Noble Disciple of the Buddha, and that they were overjoyed at the event. Human beings, however, may not have been aware of this, since due to their indulgence in pleasures, they would not have been able to know that just a moment ago the mind of a human being had realized the Supreme Dharma.

After a while, when the thunderous exclamation had died down, what remained of him was the absolute purity of the dharma which bathed his body and mind and enveloped all the worlds. To him it was so breathless a wonder that it was indescribable to others. Whatever loving-kindness and interest there had been in teaching others now [momentarily] disappeared. This was because of the realization of the fact that the dharma at that level is so subtle, profound and wonderful that it would be practically impossible for most people to understand it. For a moment he hesitated to offer the message to others, being content with experiencing the wonders of the dharma alone. He was overcome by gratitude towards the Buddha, who realized the whole truth and who proclaimed it for the sake of Deliverance. That message is absolutely true, being irrefutable in all respects. Through respectful gratitude, he was moved to an insatiable recollection all night of the virtues of the Buddha and his excellence. But so profound is the dharma that to preach it would be inviting harsh and hostile criticism, and, as a result, efforts in that direction would hurt rather than help others. This was the thought which momentarily passed through his mind just after the discovery of the Supreme Dharma. It was after a few moments that he broadened his perspective, reviewed his practice and surveyed others' potentialities.

The Buddha's Path was intended for all, who, like him, cared and dared to take up the challenge. There were more of these kinds of people. Ever since the proclamation of that message by the Buddha, there have been an innumerable number of disciples who have been able to realize and attain to the same dharma, after as well as before the complete passing away of the Buddha. It was this afterthought that made him decide to bring the Buddha's message once again to those who would listen to it in earnest and with respect. There would be no point in teaching those who would not listen or who would listen without respect or interest, taking the dharma for granted and treating it as merely commonplace. Only after a series of painful ordeals was the Supreme Dharma won. It was therefore useless 'dissolving' the priceless dharma 'in the ocean' as one would dissolve a worthless thing. It was for the sake of those who listened that the dharma was proclaimed. A physician prescribes a remedy for his patients with a view to curing them of their suffering and pain. As long as they prefer living with their disease, so long will they turn a deaf ear to the physician's advice.

A person governed by dharma is self-sufficient, and is able to find peace and bliss in all circumstances, since he does not have to depend on anyone or anything for his welfare and security. There is nothing which can disturb or upset the mind which has been absolutely purified and which is unshakable. Because of this, the Venerable Acharn preferred staying in the wilds most of the time. He helped others from time to time when occasion permitted. Where there is dharma, there is peace and bliss. When the mind is dharma, it is bliss and peace itself. To struggle [for outward results] would only be imposing suffering on oneself. This made the Venerable Acharn very careful in preaching the dharma, never doing so indiscriminately. The means and methods adopted by the Buddha must always be considered and followed. This had always been the guideline for

his practice. It should also be the guideline for other practicing Buddhists so that they will remind themselves to follow the Buddha's Dispensation with self-control and reap full benefit in the present and future.

Having considered again the means and methods of preaching and practice, the Venerable Acharn again contemplated the Supreme Dharma which had dawned upon his mind. It was the full and complete manifestation of dharma. It was at the same time unexpected, unimaginable, and indescribable. He felt as though he had been dead and then had been born once again, but it was a death and birth so wonderful that they could not be related to anything known thus far. The insight that appeared with this new and wonderful birth was unknown and undreamed of, despite the fact that it inherently belonged to the mind itself. So miraculous and excitingly wonderful was the glory of its ray dawning upon him that for the moment it occurred to him that there might not be anyone who would be able to understand the dharma so paradoxical and so profound.

The Dharma of Deliverance

The Venerable Acharn's mind was by nature ultra-dynamic and often took delight in acrobatic feats, even in the early stages of his practice. With the Final Goal in sight, it once again, performed the feats of strength characteristic of itself. As soon as the threefold cycle²⁷ was broken, there still remained three rounds of it encircling [the delivered mind]. With the end of the first round there arose the Pali term *lopo* [removal], meaning that by its final function, all clinging to mundane things had been removed. At the end of its second round there arose the Pali term *vimutti* [deliverance], meaning that by its final function, full-final Deliverance had been attained. With the end of the third round appeared the Pali word *anālayo* [no lingering desire], pointing to the fact by its final function, no lingering desire now existed. The mind thenceforward became *ekacitta* [one mind], *ekadhamma* [one dharma], there being no duality as in the mundane world.

This was the Dharma of Deliverance, divorced once and for all from all mundane things and therefore being one. This Dharma of Deliverance occurred only once, not twice or more than that. The Buddha and his Noble Disciples knew the Dharma of Deliverance only once, and thenceforward became *ekacitta* and *ekadhamma*, with no higher attainment. The aggregates of mind and body still remained as such, just aggregates without any alien ingredient. They were no longer poisonous, no longer doing harm. They maintained themselves as before, without any increase or reduction after his attainment. They still functioned in accordance with the order of the mind, which now had been delivered from attachment to them. Each functioned on its own plane, each being equally true in its own plane. There was no more conflict or struggle against each other, for both were already pacified in their own way. This condition of being co-functionaries would continue until the time came when each would go its own way. The mind that is purified then becomes *yathidippo ca nibutto*-the fire [with its fuel exhausted] becomes extinguished.

Conventional language has reached its limit here, further description being impossible. Such was what happened to the Venerable Acharn on that eventful night, when, alter

²⁷ Vatta. The threefold cycle of kilesa, karma and vipaka-defilements, actions supported by defilements, and effects on the mind produced by actions supported by defilements and again producing more defilements. This cycle is thus continuous.

three rounds of the threefold cycle, the boundary between the mundane and Deliverance became fixed [although the mundane and the Delivered still functioned together for a period of time].

For the remainder of the night the Venerable Acharn was moved to tears by the feeling of *sanvega* (see footnote 12) for his own ignorance in the past which had caused him such untold suffering in the cycle of rebirths and redeaths. With final disillusionment and attainment to the dharma of the Buddha proclaimed more than 2,000 years ago, it was to him like a lone and weary traveler coming across a large pond inviting him to drink of its clear and invigorating waters, He felt as though he could pay homage to the Triple Gem all his life for this great discovery and still not adequately be able to express his gratitude to the Buddha and the Sangha of old who had followed that same Path. Should there have been anyone who had seen him prostrating with tearful face, certainly that person would have thought him to have been overwhelmed with sorrow and praying to the gods for help. But these tears and prostrations were only the expression of the most profound and humble gratitude towards what had helped lead him to the greatest of all discoveries. This tearful, prostrating bhikkhu was one who had realized the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha within his own mind. The Buddha has said that 'Whoever sees the dharma sees me; whoever sees me sees the dharma.'

That night, terrestrial and celestial angels, having joined in the whole-hearted appreciation of the Venerable Acharn's Attainment which had thundered over the realms of consciousness, paid him a visit and reverently expressed their wish to listen to his sermon, but because he was still engrossed in the Supreme Dharma, and would be so for some time longer, he indicated to them that he was still occupied and that he would like them to come later. They understood his wish and returned to their realms overjoyed at the sight of a *visuddhideva*²⁸ on the first night of his Attainment.

At dawn, after his meditation sitting, the Venerable Acharn recollected the wonders of what had happened the previous night, and then offered his thankfulness to the villagers who had regularly provided him with alms-food. His thankfulness also went to the tree under which he was seated during his meditation. When the time came for going into the village on alms-round, he at first thought it unnecessary to seek any food that day since the bliss of Deliverance experienced during the night was more than enough. Because of the loving-kindness he had towards the villagers who had been so helpful to him in offering him food, he was bound by moral duty to go to the hilltribes village as usual.

That day there was a special degree of loving-kindness towards the villagers who offered food into his alms-bowl and who were working within their homes, and towards their children who were playing on the dusty grounds in front of and behind their houses. He observed them with more interest and loving-kindness, although on previous days he had never paid attention to anyone in particular. Even the people appeared to be in high spirits, all, wearing a courteous smile when, they saw him coming.

²⁸ There are three kinds of deva: *sammādeva* or *devas* through tradition, referring to kings. Traditionally, a king was in the Pali language addressed by the term *deva*. The second kind is *uppatthideva* or *devas* by birth, referring to the unseen beings who may be divided into terrestrial, celestial and the most advanced, called *Brahma*. The third kind is *visuddhideva*, *devas* by virtue of absolute purity of mind. This refers to the Noble Disciple of the highest kind, the *arahant*. The Venerable Acharn now become a *visuddhideva* by virtue of his highest attainment.

Back at his place on the mountain, his body gave no indication of wanting food since he was still blessed with the taste of the dharma. He was neither hungry nor tired, but since the food was already there, he ate it to maintain the strength of the body which cannot do without crude food for very long. The food seemed tasteless, it being superseded by the taste of the dharma. It is said in Pali sabbarasain dhammaraso jinati - the taste of dharma conquers all other tastes.

The Angels Show Their Appreciation

On the following night, the angels from various realms and from almost all directions, and who reverently respected the dharma came to pay him a second visit. They told him of the brilliant light of the dharma which they had seen the night before, saying that it was as if all the worlds of invisible beings, high and low, in the Three Realms were abruptly struck by a tremor of awe and wonder by that blinding light which penetrated through all realms. By that light anyone whose mind was developed to a certain degree of knowledge was sure to see through to other realms which he formerly had not seen or known of.

'The light of dharma radiating from Your Holiness was far more brilliant than hundreds or thousands of suns,' they said. 'Those who did not see or who were not aware of the wonders of this light are to be pitied, since they have missed one of the great opportunities of their lives. The angels from the various realms could not help expressing their amazement and ecstatic admiration for Your Holiness' achievement. Your attainment is great and wonderful. An uncountable number of sentient beings on various planes, having been enveloped in its divine light, have all experienced a kind of bliss previously unknown to them all. Many are the beings in all the worlds who have missed this outstanding opportunity which we now enjoy.'

The Venerable Acharn then delighted them with a sermon for the sake of their advancement to higher planes of existence. After they had all left, he recalled his mode of practice, which had been unusually beset with difficulties and dangers and which might therefore be called 'The Path Through the Threshold of Death'. For him it was evident that without having braved a series of ordeals which threatened death again and again, he would not have been able to have had his wish fulfilled and to have achieved his Ultimate Goal.

His Spouse (in Former Lives)

A strange incident occurred soon after this, and the writer again asks the forgiveness of the reader if the following account is somewhat inappropriate. But because this sort of thing could happen to everyone, the writer, in spite of himself, has decided to set it down here so that those who are able may learn something from it. This incident involved the Venerable Acharn's own spouse in former lives.

The Venerable Acharn and his wife had together made a resolution to become Buddhas in the future. She would occasionally visit him before his final Attainment during his meditation sitting in the form of an invisible being. He would instruct her and then tell her to leave. She was unable to take a comparatively permanent birth on any plane because of her great concern for him. She was afraid that he would forget their former

association and their former resolution to become Buddhas. It was for this reason that she was compelled to visit him now and again. The Venerable Acharn had told her that he had given up his resolution in order to attain to the Cessation of Suffering within this lifetime. Undergoing more births meant more deaths, and consequently more suffering. This time, however, she came in response to his thinking of her. They had shared the experiences of happiness and hardships together for so long in the past, that he wished to tell her of his Achievement so that she would no longer have to be concerned about him. Because of her great concern for him she had to dwell in one of the subtle planes, and thus had an invisible body.

She wished she could have come more often, but she dared not do so because she felt embarrassed, although she knew in reality that there could not be anything disgraceful either for him or for her in such a condition. The Venerable Acharn had told her that he didn't want her to come because she might have been the cause of a delay in his meditation effort, not because there would have been anything indecent such as there would have been in the world of human beings. 'The mind is a delicate thing,' the Venerable Acharn used to say. 'Even a delicate interference would be a disturbance and all obstacle to its progress.'

She had learned of his final Attainment the night before, but instead of being overjoyed, she had become distressed and forlorn.

'You are now delivered from this ocean of suffering,' she complained. 'From now on I will have no one to look to for counsel and help. You are now like a star high up in the sky, whereas I am still struggling all alone in this vast ocean. Kindly give me a helping hand through the radiance of your loving-kindness,' she implored, 'so that I may be able to attain to the Cessation of Suffering in the near future.'

'I don't want you to be overcome by sorrow and grief,' the Venerable Acharn said to relieve her. 'That's not why I wanted you to come. That is certainly not the way a person of goodwill should treat another. Do you remember when we developed the virtues of the Brahmavihara [loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity] together?'

'I remember it well enough,' she said, 'since we developed these virtues together for a very long time. But now that you have departed from this mundane world, I feel all the more grieved at being forsaken by you.'

'You must remember the fundamental purpose of doing good,' the Venerable Acharn said. 'The purpose of practicing dharma, whether out of one's own conviction or through another's instruction, is to reduce or remove suffering. Such a practice should not heap more and more trouble upon oneself, which produces nothing but unprofitable suffering'

'I know that what you say is true,' she said, 'but for the worldling not absolutely freed from defilements it is impossible to resist strong feelings which overflow the mind.'

'Even in eating together,' the Venerable Acharn said, 'there is sure to be one who stops first and then another who finishes later. It is impossible to hope that both or all should finish their meal at exactly the same time. It's the same with two or more persons accumulating stores of merit together. The Buddha and Princess Yasodhara are a good example of this. The Buddha reached his goal first, and after that he took pains to return to help her progress along the same path. This is a valuable lesson. It would be more

profitable to extract something from this than to allow yourself to be overcome by grief and to complain so bitterly.

'Never once did I think of forsaking you or leaving you alone to your own fate. I called you here to help you because of my loving-kindness and my concern for your welfare and development. The better you are able to follow the instructions I will give you, the greater will be my sympathetic joy in your progress and success. Should you be able to hold your own on the Practice-path, then my concern for you would be groundless.'

Their former resolutions to become Buddhas and the later resolution of the Venerable Acharn to become a Noble Disciple of the Buddha were for the same end: the Cessation of Suffering or the breaking of the cycle of rebirths and redeaths. There had always been a close link with her regarding merits accumulated and the results received. The instruction and the advice given her were always given to the best of his ability and without fail. All these were expressions of his loving-kindness, not of any desire of his to desert her or to leave her alone. This bitter complaining on her part was therefore detrimental to her progress, giving rise to only unprofitable suffering. Never could his Deliverance be interpreted as his forsaking her, and should it be so interpreted, what, then, would all of his instruction and consolation mean? His loving-kindness for her was genuine and illimitable. She should have understood this and tried to follow his instruction, for that would have been for her own benefit.

Ever since the day of his ordination, the Venerable Acharn could not recollect a moment of having wanted to see her struggle alone. Would she be able to find anyone with more loving-kindness than this? The Venerable Acharn then pointed out that she should be glad at the fact that she was able to see the radiance of his light the night before, despite the fact that she was then in a delicate plane and could very easily have been unaware of it. Moreover, she had been blessed with the opportunity to listen to instructions which could bring her out of the dark, if she would but give an ear to them with respect. Were she not able to do so, then the dharma of his instruction and his loving-kindness would certainly come to naught.

Marriage Can Make a Hell or a Paradise on Earth

The instructions and explanations of the Venerable Acharn were like water from a mountain stream in a celestial realm being sprinkled over her agitated mind, putting out the fires of her grief and her distress. Her mind became cooled and then calm, and she was convinced of how grievously wrong she had been. She admitted her fault and regretted having troubled him because of her own self-pity. She could now see the light of dharma. Her mind was refreshed by the celestial waters and her burden of grief unloaded.

'May Your Holiness forgive me my fault,' she implored, 'so that I may be better self-controlled in the future and not do so again.'

Thereafter the Venerable Acharn told her to take rebirth in the plane that she deserved because of her disillusionment, and to not be unprofitably troubled anymore by her own worry and agitation. She delightedly obeyed him and asked his blessing in being allowed to visit him occasionally for his instruction. His permission granted, she suddenly disappeared and he emerged from his meditation to find that it was five o'clock in the morning. He hadn't slept at all since beginning his meditation sitting at about eight

o'clock the previous evening after finishing his walking meditation. The dialogue between the Venerable Acharn and his spouse in former lives, now an invisible being, had lasted for several hours.

Not long after this she returned to listen to his sermon. Now she was a beautiful angel, but as is characteristic of angels when visiting a bhikkhu they respect, she was without any of the decorations characteristic of her realm. After her mind had been cooled by disillusionment, she had suddenly taken birth in the celestial realm called Tavatimsa, a plane blessed with comfort and entertainment of various kinds, because of the merits she had accumulated in her former lives with him as his spouse. She never forgot that all the happiness she was then enjoying was the result of following his advice and his instructions, without which she never would have been so blessed. It was in the midst of these pleasures that she recollected how they had come to be. His kindness to her was therefore illimitable, one which she would never be able to repay.

She then realized how important it is to make a careful choice of everything which a person uses and everyone with whom one associates. Most important of all for laymen is the choice of a spouse, who may be regarded as not only living together, but also as breathing together, sharing experiences of happiness and hardships alike. Whatever affects one, be it good or evil, is sure to affect the other. Blessed is one who has a good spouse. He or she may be somewhat inferior in social status, intelligence, and even in habit and behaviour, but it is the spouse who will prevent the other from falling into evil ways and then lead him or her along the right path. If, however, both are good enough to take delight in working for their development, then their house will be a home, or better still, an angel's abode on earth. There will be no quarrels or fault-finding since both would be likewise self-controlled, with their thoughts and deeds guided by the Law of Righteousness. The parties thus joined in marriage can be said to help build a hell or paradise on earth, sharing in each others' miseries as well as in each others' happiness, depending on whether they enjoy doing evil or good. This involves the lives to follow as well as this present life.

Evidence of this can be seen in the case of this angel who followed the Venerable Acharn's instruction to avoid evils and to accumulate whatever wholesome deeds were possible. As a result of her practice, she was completely safeguarded from dangers and unprofitable sufferings. The Venerable Acharn forgave her misunderstanding and her bitter complaining so that she would not have to bear feelings of guilt over them, and then he delighted her with another sermon, after which, she, now a happy angel, took leave of him by circumambulating him three times, keeping him on her right. She then drew back for some distance, and, floating up into the air, returned to her realm with gratitude and delight.

Appreciation by the Buddhas and the Arahant Disciples

On the nights following the Venerable Acharn's full-final Attainment, there were a number of Buddhas together with their arahant disciples who paid him a visit in appreciation for his Deliverance. On one night a Buddha with tens of thousands of disciples would come, whereas on another night another Buddha would come with hundreds of thousands of his disciples. The number of disciples accompanying each Buddha was not the same, depending on the achievement of each Buddha. Those disciples who accompanied each Buddha, however, were not the actual number of disciples. They were merely symbolic, representing the total number of disciples of one as

compared with those of another. Among the arahant disciples were also a number of samaneras following along. In the abstract or impersonal sense, the term 'arahant' applies to samaneras as well as bhikkhus.

The Buddhas instructed the Venerable Acharn on many points, saying, 'The Tathagatas [the word the Buddhas use when referring to them selves, equivalent to the word 'I'], having known that you are delivered from the great prison of the vatta [cycle of rebirths and redeaths] now come to give you our appreciation. It is a prison vast, strongly guarded and replete with distracting and tempting influences, all serving to strengthen its enclosure and blinding the inmates to the fact that they are but prisoners with their own freedom forfeited for their indulgence. This is like a person suffering from an illness but who takes no interest in seeking out a remedy. Whatever remedies there may be are absolutely useless for them. The Tathagata's dharma is like the remedy for that illness. Sentient beings are afflicted by the pain of disease caused by the piercing arrows of their own defilements. Their illness seems to be incurable, at least as long as they refuse to accept the dharma to cure it. They must suffer rebirth and redeath along with other physical and mental afflictions without end. The dharma all round them is therefore of no avail, since they neither care nor dare to look and listen and apply it.

'Thus there is the dharma, and there are the sentient beings whirling helplessly in the tempestuous wind of their own sufferings. Until they take notice of the dharma and put it into practice, no one can offer them any help. The Buddhas may come and go; yet the disease is still there to trouble those who will not learn. The message of all the Buddhas is the same since the defilements within the minds of sentient beings are all the same, there being no defilements beyond the ability of the buddha's dharma to uncover and eradicate except that the people will succumb to their own defilements and thus see the dharma as inferior to it.

'Dharma and defilements are contrary to each other. One who follows dharma must resist or disobey defilements, whereas one who obeys defilement must necessarily disobey dharma, reasoning that the dharma is troublesome and deprives him of his pleasure. But a wise man, equipped with discernment, will not surrender himself like that. He is never like a turtle being boiled in a pot and dying there. In the same way is the world boiled by its own defilements, not knowing how to get out of the pot which is its confinement. All living beings, are involved, whether in water, on land, in the air, or under the earth. The heat is there within their own minds. Wherever they go and stay, they take that heat with them.

'Now you have seen the Tathagata and know that this is none other than absolute purity of mind. That the Tathagata can come here is only through the sammati form [assumed, supposed, mundane or relative form].'

The Venerable Acharn then said, 'I have no doubt in the Buddha and the arahant disciples, but how, after your anupadisesa-nibbana [complete passing away without any remainder or residue], are you still able to come in such a form?'

In reply the Buddha said, 'Such a temporary form is necessary for one who has attained to absolute purity, but who is without form, to come to one who has attained to absolute purity but who still assumes a mundane form. But when both have attained to anupadisesa-nibbana, then no mundane form is necessary. The same is true between the Buddhas, who were able to know about the Buddhas before them through this process of mundane form first, taking this manifestation as a temporary means of

communication. There is no expression or manifestation through absolute deliverance. In the same manner have the Tathagata and arahant disciples assumed our manifestation to you, in order that you may be able to know and see what a particular Buddha and his arahant disciples look like.

'In other words, wherever contact through a mundane form is required, an assumed form is necessary to make that contact possible. But wherever a relation through absolute deliverance is required, then no more form in the realm of mundane form is necessary, since both sides are already equal and identical. However, when characteristics are to be made known, a mundane form is again required as a contrast by which one may be able to understand that absolute deliverance is characterized by being void of signs, manifestations, or expressions, being naturally brilliant and also being supported by a blissful peace beyond compare. Those who understand this fact do not have any doubt as to the absolute deliverance that is to be expressed or described through mundane form [relatively speaking] and the absolute deliverance that exists by itself without dependence on anything whatsoever.'

The Buddha then asked him, 'Did you put that question out of doubt or for the sake of greeting?'

The Venerable Acharn answered, 'It was for the sake of greeting that I did so, since, in truth I have no doubt whatsoever in the mundane or in absolute deliverance, or in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, having realized for myself the passage 'Whoever sees the dharma sees the Tathagata', signifying the fact that the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are none other than the purity and deliverance from the mundane. Whether the Buddha and arahant disciples should come or not cannot change my conviction through what I have realized.'

The Buddha then said that he also understood the Venerable Acharn's intention in putting such a question to him, that it was a means of exchanging greetings.

It was noticeable that the arahant disciples accompanying the Buddha did not say anything, only sitting in their respective places in an impressive manner. Even the small samaneras were seated quietly although [in the eyes of worldly people] they would have been more lovely than impressive. These samaneras were around nine to twelve years of age, and seeing them at first, one would not be able to help feeling like an adult would when he sees a small boy, wanting to tussle his hair. Those who didn't know beforehand that these samaneras were arahants would certainly be doing something which should never be done. Those who knew already that they were arahants would never think of doing such a thing. Like the other arahant disciples, these samaneras were no less impressive in their demeanour. Thus all the arahant disciples, both bhikkhus and samaneras, were equally inspiring and impressive through their being perfectly self-controlled.

If the Venerable Acharn was curious to know about the traditional practices of walking and sitting meditation, the way one should dress for walking and sitting meditation, and the mutual way of respect between bhikkhus, for example, he would be shown the correct method during his meditation sitting, either by the Buddha himself or by an arahant disciple. All the explanations given to him were given in detail. In walking meditation, for example, he was shown how to place his hands, how to walk, and how to control himself while walking. Sitting meditation was also demonstrated in detail, [showing in which Direction an aspirant should face, the sitting posture, etc.

Respect Based on the Mundane and Absolute Deliverance

The way in which bhikkhus paid respects to each other had a remarkable characteristic. One time the Venerable Acharn was curious as to how bhikkhus paid respects to each other in the time of the Buddha. During his meditation sitting, there appeared in his vision the Buddha and many disciples of different ages, some with, silver-grey hair, and also samaneras, both big and small. None of them arrived at the same time however, each one coming alone or one after the other. Whoever arrived first sat in front, whereas those arriving later seated themselves in the order of their arrival. A samanera who arrived first thus seated himself in front of bhikkhus, whereas bhikkhus looking old enough to be their grandfathers were content to sit behind these young ones, and they did so without any sign of embarrassment. Even the Buddha himself, arriving later, sat down indifferently behind other bhikkhus and samaneras.

The Venerable Acharn wondered about this apparent lack of order in the circle of the Buddha's disciples, disciples who were renowned for their orderliness and discipline. A moment later, however, without the Buddha uttering a word of explanation, the Venerable Acharn understood that this kind of respect is based on the dharma of deliverance alone, there being no supposed or relative truth involved. On this basis there is no traditional or social discipline regarding the seniority of ordination, which is but relative truth. From the Buddha himself on down to the arahant disciples and the smallest samaneras, there is absolute equality based on absolute purity. When the Venerable Acharn again wondered about the conventional way of paying respect between them, there was a rapid change of places by the Buddha and the arahant disciples in front of him. The Buddha was now seen to be seated in front of the gathering, whereas the samaneras who had been sitting in front moved back behind the bhikkhus, all then being seated in their commonly known-disciplinary order. The Venerable Acharn then came to know that this was certainly the way of giving respect to one another in the circle of bhikkhus in the time of the Buddha. The bhikkhu who was an arahant was to respect another well-behaved bhikkhu who was his senior in ordination, even though that bhikkhu was not yet an arahant.

After this, the Buddha instructed the Venerable Acharn saying, 'Bhikkhus of the Tathagata are characterized by respect and goodwill towards one another, which is based on equality of honor and dignity. There is no quarrel or aggressive attitude in a gathering, however large, of the Tathagata's bhikkhus. A gathering of bhikkhus that does not respect one another or that does not behave in accordance with the Dharma and the Vinaya [Law and Discipline] appointed to be their Teacher in my place cannot be called the Tathagata's bhikkhus. They are false bhikkhus, only pretending to be real ones. On the contrary, a gathering of bhikkhus who obediently follow the Dharma and the Vinaya are entitled to be called the Tathagata's bhikkhus, no matter where they are ordained, who they are, and to what caste or nationality they belong. They are all following in the footsteps of the Tathagata and are sure to attain to the Cessation of Suffering sooner or later.'

After this brief instruction, the Buddha and his arahant disciples disappeared instantly, and the Venerable Acharn was convinced of the truth of what he had seen.

Corpse Without a Cemetery

Even the way of robing during sitting and walking meditation was shown him by an arahant disciple whenever the Venerable Acharn wondered as to what was the correct way of doing so. This arahant disciple showed him the way of sitting meditation both with wearing and not wearing the upper robe [sanghati] which he said it wasn't necessary to wear. He was also shown the colors of the robes, of which there were three shades of the yellowish-brown dye made from the core or heartwood of the Jackfruit tree—light, medium and dark. From this it is evident that the Venerable Acharn's way of practice was always supported by concrete evidence from the foregoing traditions of the Noble Disciples. Never was it the result of guessing or speculation. This was why his practice was regular and flawless, which was and is unexcelled in modern times. The disciples who followed his traditions reflect great credit of their teacher, whereas those who arbitrarily change his way to suit their convenience may thus be likened to a corpse without a cemetery, a child without parents, or a pupil without a teacher. It seems the Venerable Acharn was always guided by something within, which could not always be told to everyone, and of whom there were hardly any able to do like him.

His Mode of Practice and Teaching in Chiangmai

Except for the one Rains Retreat which he spent in Wat Chedi Luang within the town of Chiangmai itself, the other places where he dwelt during the remaining ten years were mostly in the wilds surrounded by all kinds of dangers. His life was therefore outstanding and spectacular concerning both his mode of practice, his adventures, and his knowledge of the inner dharma throughout the period of his dhutanga wanderings. His solitary life in the mountains and forests would have been in the eyes of worldly people, overwhelmed at all times by suffering and fear, especially that oppressive and shuddering fear which would have tormented them day and night. But to the Venerable Acharn such a life in complete seclusion was most favourable for exertion and greatly conducive to the health of body and mind. His full-final Attainment was won while living in the solitude of a remote hilltribes district. It was not until later on that there were some dhutanga bhikkhus who approached him.

Some of the bhikkhus who approached him were the Venerable Chao Khun Thet from the district of Tha Boh in the town of Nong Khai, the Venerables Phra Acharn Sarn and Phra Acharn Khao from Wat Tham Klong Phane. They stayed with him only for a period and then were ordered to separate, to find places of seclusion of their own which were in faraway hilltribes villages, some alongside a mountain and others on top of another mountain. The hilltribes villages were only small ones, some with four to five houses, others with nine to ten houses. The alms-food offered by them was suitable enough for the daily sustenance of the body. The Venerable Acharn himself always preferred living alone in such places.

It is worth noting that the dhutanga bhikkhus under his guidance and training were all resolute and fearless, seeking the dharma at the risk of their own lives, putting the goal of dharma before everything else, their lives included, and what was more important, wherever tigers or other wild and ferocious beasts abounded, there he often told his disciples to go and stay. Within such an environment mindfulness and wisdom are bound to function unflinchingly, exertion be unremitting, and strength of will more rapidly

advanced, than they would have been had they been dwelling in places without such threats.

The Venerable Acharn's own life was absorbed in the bliss of seclusion day and night. In his sylvan retreat far from the abodes of human beings, however, he associated with invisible beings from time to time, such as terrestrial and celestial angels, demons, ghosts, nagas and Brahma. Since he had had a wide experience with them, this association posed him no problem. Besides such invisible beings, he also helped several hilltribes peoples such as the Ekoh, Khamu, Muser and Maew, who were all impressed in his teaching and who were faithful to him to such an extent that they would have readily sacrificed their lives for him. To those not acquainted with these people, the term 'hilltribes' usually meant dirtiness and ugliness, as well as a primitive or barbarous way of life. But his experiences with them were all to the contrary. He found they had beautiful features with white skin, and that they were not at all dirty. They were a cultured people with an etiquette and discipline of their own. They followed their leaders obediently, being docile and united. With this type of culture and these sorts of habits, the term 'forest', instead of implying beastliness or savagery, ironically revealed truthfulness and morality, with no crimes of greed and violence as can be readily found in the concrete forests of the cities and towns. Forests of trees and animals are in a sense more secure and comfortable than the concrete forests of townspeople which are filled with dangers from the ferocious defilements of greed, hatred, and delusion.

It is a mysterious forest where the 'wild and ferocious' animals of defilements live and roam in abundance, attacking the people in mysterious ways, causing deep wounds which are difficult to heal. These wounds, however, are not only detrimental to the health of the body, but also to the mind. It is a great irony that few, if any, of the townspeople take any interest in their wounds and thus pay no heed in seeking any remedy to cure themselves. Their wounds therefore become 'infected' and the disease chronic and epidemic. This kind of forest is within the minds of everyone, men, bhikkhus, and samaneras alike.

The attacks of the defilements are stealthy and difficult for a person to guard against. That is why the Venerable Acharn preferred staying in the wilds so that he would be better able to deal with the ferocious beasts within. It is there in the wilds that these wild beasts can be tamed or driven away from the mind. A human being is an intelligent creature, and as such, he should not succumb to those wild beasts within, but should fight them courageously and be justifiably called human.

Within such an environment, whenever there was a bhikkhu who approached the Venerable Acharn for training and guidance, his instruction always called for absolute self-sacrifice and courage, which instruction was therefore suitable to those, like him, who were ready to meet any challenge. If they were to die, they were willing to die exerting themselves to their utmost; and if they survived, they would be relieved in knowing that at least a small degree of insight and deliverance had been won, that they would not have to suffer endless rebirths and redeaths in the worlds of becoming.

This was the outstanding method of his teaching in Chiangmai, which was different from the teachings he had given elsewhere before that time. His teaching here was absolute, unbending, and admitted no leniency whatsoever. However, this teaching also suited those who approached him for instruction, who listened to it introspectively, attempting only to observe their own ferocious beasts within, never once complaining that his teaching was too strict or too severe. The stronger his instruction, the deeper the dharma,

the more poised the listeners' minds, and the more contemplating their mindfulness and wisdom. His teaching in Chiangmai was most profound since his attainment there was most advanced and his [dhutanga bhikkhu] disciples' purpose was correspondingly most courageous, with only the Cessation of Suffering in mind. Besides the usual instruction, there were aim special techniques to detect minds that were playing truant. These were most effective in apprehending the truants that liked to steal out in order to stray into the various places they had frequented and enjoyed before.

A Case of Love at First Sight

While staying in the mountain area of Chiangmai, a strange incident happened within the circle of his dhutanga disciples. This story is told here in the hopes that it may be a lesson for those who still do not have the ability to know what it is that they have done in former lives. It reveals the power of karma [in this case love] which sometimes works so mysteriously. This story was told by a Venerable Acharn who had stayed with the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun.

Once a certain bhikkhu was going to have a bath with another bhikkhu at water-hole near the path leading to the farms of the villagers. This path, however, was quite far from the villagers' homes and was usually not frequented by them. While the bhikkhus were preparing for their bath, a number of girls happened to pass by, which was very unusual indeed, as the place was deserted most of the time. This one bhikkhu caught sight of one of the girls, and he immediately fell in love with her. He was absolutely unable to control his feeling. This bhikkhu was also very much frightened of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun because of what he would say if he knew of this, as well as his own helpless condition, which he knew was dangerous to his bhikkhuhood.

He wasn't able to sleep all night, being overcome by worry and fear of this strange feeling, the strength of which he never imagined existed. He wanted to forget this feeling and tried his best to control it throughout the night, but it seemed mockingly to defy his efforts at control and hit back with a vengeance at his every attempt. The Venerable Acharn, however, knew about this bhikkhu's struggle through his mind-reading, ability. He did not say anything to that bhikkhu the following morning, seeing that he was very much afraid of him already. Any reproach on his part could only have made matters worse. So he smiled sympathetically at that bhikkhu when he met him in the morning, and despite the bhikkhu's obvious trembling with fear, he pretended to not notice it.

When the time came for going into the village for alms-food, the Venerable Acharn, in a manner somewhat unusual, spoke to the other bhikkhus so that this bhikkhu could also hear what he said. He said that since this bhikkhu had spent the entire night in intensifying his efforts, there would be no need for him to go out for alms-food, that it was better for him to continue his efforts. The other bhikkhus would gather food for him so that he wouldn't have to interrupt his efforts.

The Venerable Acharn did not look at that bhikkhu while he was speaking, and having spoken, he led his disciples into the village as usual. That bhikkhu was left to continue his walking-meditation practice in his place by himself. Of course, the Venerable Acharn did this specifically in order to help that poor bhikkhu, whom he knew was a victim of circumstances and was trying hard to help himself. At mealtime, food was shared with him and a messenger was sent to inform him that he was free to partake of it at his own place or to come and eat with the other bhikkhus at the meeting-place. He chose to

come to the meeting-place, and as soon as he arrived, the Venerable Acharn looked away while speaking to him gently with pleasant and comforting words. The poor bhikkhu was able to eat only a little, and even that just for the sake of politeness.

On that day two of this bhikkhu's friends, the narrator of this story and another bhikkhu, were greatly surprised to see their Acharn doing this, which was very unusual and which they had never seen him do before. They went to see the poor victim of circumstances and asked him about his intensified efforts, about which they had learned from the Venerable Acharn, thinking that he must have achieved something special in doing so. The poor bhikkhu smiled weakly saying, 'It's not because of my achievement that the Venerable Acharn did what he did. He must already have known how much I was suffering and what he did was to save me from becoming even more miserable.' Asked what it was that would have made him so miserable, that bhikkhu at first felt ashamed and was hesitant to speak about it to his friends. Finally he made them promise not to breathe a word of it to the Venerable Acharn, whom he believed must know about it even better than he himself, and that was why he was very much afraid and ashamed.

'Did you see anything unusual yesterday while we were getting ready to bathe at the water-hole?' he asked.

His friend, being puzzled, said, 'I didn't see anything unusual except some girls passing by.'

'But that's what's making me so miserable,' the poor bhikkhu said, 'and that's why the Venerable Acharn told me not to go into the village this morning. He was afraid I might collapse if I saw her again.'

'But why should you collapse?'

'And why not?' the bhikkhu answered. 'I have fallen in love with her, and without her even knowing it! Now the kammattana [theme of meditation] is all lost. All that I can see and think about is her beauty which has made me love her to distraction. I thought my heart would break the moment I saw her, and until now I have been practically helpless since I cannot subdue this feeling no matter how hard I try. 'Can you find a way to help me?'

'Well,' his friend said, 'there might be a way. If you can't control your feeling while staying here, maybe it would be better if you went away for a while and found another place far away from here. If you don't dare ask the Venerable Acharn for permission, then I will explain it to him myself. I'll tell him that this place doesn't suit you at all. He will readily give his consent, especially since he knows about it already. He just hasn't said anything about it, fearing that you will be too ashamed.'

This was thought to be the best way to save that poor bhikkhu, and that evening, when the Venerable Acharn was told of this plan, he gave his permission but hinted that such a 'disease' was very difficult to cure, being as it was the result of [former] karma. 'The original cause is inside,' he said, 'and it makes the patient succumb to the attack.' Then he said nothing more, and nobody at that time knew what it was that he was implying. After all, this was quite an embarrassing matter. The poor bhikkhu did not dare tell the Venerable Acharn about it, who likewise did not say anything for fear that it would hurt that bhikkhu even more. Even his friend who proposed the plan to the Venerable Acharn would not speak of it directly. Thus it was an open secret to all, with everyone knowing about it but nobody mentioning it.

The following day, the poor bhikkhu took leave of the Venerable Acharn, who, as before, quietly gave his consent, and from that day he went to stay in another place quite some distance away and all of his friends were relieved, being certain that he was now safe.

But can who flee the forces of karma? Things later turned out as the Venerable Acharn had hinted. Not long after that bhikkhu had moved to a new place, the hilltribes girl again happened to go to that very place. This was very much out of the ordinary for her, but for him it was the straw that broke the camel's back. He was at his wit's end, and, realizing that he could endure it no longer, decided to return to laylife and after that was married to this young Muser [name of one of the hilltribes] girl of that village.

This romantic story gives us many good lessons. Superficially, it may be called 'love at first sight', but strictly speaking, it had its origin far back in the past, otherwise a love as strong as that could not have been produced 'at first sight'. Both had never seen or spoken to each other before, but had come across each other 'by accident'. Even after his self-imposed exile, she again met him by accident. The bhikkhu himself was under the guidance of the Venerable Acharn. He was well-behaved and self-controlled. But the moment he caught sight of her, every other thing was lost to him. Thereafter he was obsessed by a feeling which was very awkward for a person like him. He was then victimized and tyrannized by the forces that stifled him ruthlessly.

This story may evoke a smile on the part of many, but he who is wise does not make fun of others as he himself is still in the same boat as they are. Such defilements are not to be mocked or ridiculed. The hilltribes people generally did not prefer a close acquaintance with bhikkhus, so this meeting could only have been possible through the results of former karma of both parties. The forces of karma are superior to everything else. The Venerable Acharn must already have known that this case was incurable and so did not admonish the poor bhikkhu or offer him any more help or suggestions than he did.

Merciful Fault-Finding

During his stay in Chiangmai, the Venerable Acharn often made use of his special psychic ability to apprehend the truants who liked to steal out and steal into former haunts while listening to a sermon. He especially used this technique with bhikkhus who approached him for training and guidance. In such cases, there was no need to worry if the listeners would be hurt as all of them were dedicated to finding the Supreme Dharma. Whenever they were scolded by the Venerable Acharn, either directly or tacitly, they were willing to rectify themselves as best they could, they not being ashamed of their own faults or deficiencies. On the contrary, they would feel thankful for his kind 'fault-finding'.

His instruction under such circumstance was advanced and absolute to suit the listeners' needs, there being nothing to be withheld from their searching and dedicated minds which were on the point of being fully developed. His disciples had then rid themselves of pride and vanity in their former rank or [academic] knowledge, which was not often the case elsewhere. His explanation was personal and therefore highly flexible, being specially adapted to suit an individual case and to attack a particular point of each disciple. It was also in accordance with the degree of maturity of each individual, both in the negative or preventative aspect and in the positive or aspect of encouragement. His answer to each question was direct and detailed, clearing away whatever doubts the

questioner may have had. There was hardly any disappointment on the part of his disciples, especially in the field of meditation, which he had skilfully mastered. Every passage of his dharma explanation was impressive and absorbing, whether it be in the realm of moral precepts, concentration or meditation, or wisdom. His listeners would move to ecstatic delight in his dharma for many days.

Inner Dialogue and Strategic Weapons

During his solitary life in the wilds of Chiangmai [before his full-final Attainment], the sole aim of the Venerable Acharn was the Supreme Dharma yet to be realized. Every moment of mind was directed towards it and every movement of body was controlled in accordance with it. Sleep being the only exception, every waking hour was an hour for exertion. The work of contemplation was directed within, with a 'dialogue in earnest' between mindfulness-and-wisdom on the one hand and defilements on the other. The theme of the dialogue was deliverance from suffering, which was regarded as the goal on which exertion was based. Whatever outlet any defilements tried to force open to overflow his mind, that he filled with the counter-force of mindfulness-and-wisdom. Whatever trick or guile used to hit, box, or bind him, that he tore up, broke down and crushed with the counter-force of mindfulness-and-wisdom, until victory was scored at one point after another. Whatever point was still dominated by defilements he energetically strengthened his forces of faith and exertion supported by mindfulness-and-wisdom and then struck relentlessly at the positions still held by defilements. With undivided attention and unremitting effort, attack after attack was launched with smashing results and position after position of defilements was occupied until the final and decisive victory was won. The emperor over the mind dominated by the threefold cycle was dethroned and all the lesser defilements tumbled down like ninepins. Such was the final stage of exertion, the last leg of the long journey, being unlimited by time but always directed at the goal which was then in sight.

After the destination had been reached and his desire completely fulfilled, the weapon of mindfulness-and-wisdom needed no more development or conscious function. It was called up whenever there was any need of its function, and after that sank back instantly. There was no longer the condition of being always on the alert for any attack. Whenever there was nothing to summon it to service, there seemed to be nothing superficially different from ordinary people, except that the mind was at all times bathed in quietude and bliss, undisturbed by environment, although still conscious of it. While he was alone, everything in all the three worlds appeared to have ceased to exist in the same way as the defilements had ceased. While helping others, there was the need for more time for meeting and instruction, which included warnings and admonitions for the purpose of prevention. On some occasions there were visions during his meditation by which he learned about particular situations so that he would be able to deal with them properly.

The Case of a Boxer-Bhikkhu

There was a bhikkhu who had been a famous boxer when he was a layman. Having been ordained, he wished to join the circle of dhutanga bhikkhus for the sake of mind-development. He had heard of the fame of the Venerable Acharn, who was known far and wide at that time as being well-behaved and well-versed in meditation practice, so

after ordination he set out to seek the Venerable Acharn. However, somewhat unwittingly, or perhaps quite casually, he put a number of photographs, more than a dozen of them, of boxers in various styles of boxing in his bag and took them along with him to the wilds in Chiangmai where the Venerable Acharn was then staying. At the Venerable Acharn's place, he paid his respects, declared his purpose in coming and was accepted.

That night, the Venerable Acharn must have surveyed him extensively [regarding his tendencies and potentialities] by means of his meditative power, for in the morning, when all the bhikkhus were assembled in the meeting-hall, he said to that boxer-bhikkhu, 'Your original purpose is to find the dharma. Your demeanour is also agreeable and you deserve our appreciation, but why did you look so terrifying last night? It seems that you came to see me, stood about a metre in front of me and then you put on a good performance of boxing postures for quite some time. You then drew back a little, this time kicking and boxing furiously alone. Were you a boxer before taking ordination?'

At this surprising question, all in the assembly were struck dumb and all eyes were focused in astonishment on the newcomer, who had now turned pale with fear.

'What was your purpose in carrying on like that?' asked the Venerable Acharn again. 'But then, after all, it's a good thing you didn't box me!' Here the Venerable Acharn stopped since it was time to go for alms-food.

He didn't touch on that matter again that day or that evening during the instruction time. But that night he must have again checked the boxer-bhikkhu out, for the following morning he once again asked him why he had repeated his boxing styles and exercises all night.

'What's your purpose in coming here?' the Venerable Acharn asked. 'If you don't tell me, then I am afraid that I cannot let you stay here since for two successive nights you have done nothing but put on a boxing exhibition before me.'

The boxer-bhikkhu was trembling and was much too frightened to speak. It was then that a bhikkhu in the gathering, seeing the boxer-bhikkhu in such a state, asked the Venerable Acharn for permission to console him.

'You had better tell the Venerable Acharn all about this. He certainly doesn't want to do you any harm. We have all been admonished or scolded by him at one time or another since we are still worldlings. We are his disciples and we look up to him both as Master and as parent. It's but natural, isn't it, that he should point out our faults and criticize us for those faults? We have all been strongly reprobated by him, far stronger than you are being scolded now. Some have even been driven away from this place. But we stay here as we are, for we have admitted our faults and have tried to rectify ourselves, and he has never again said anything about them. You ought to take heed of his warning now and not be too frightened. Tell him the truth, all that you know about your past.'

At this the Venerable Acharn again asked the boxer-bhikkhu, 'What do you say now? I don't want to criticize you without reason, but you have entered into my vision nearly all night. Either there is something wrong with you or my vision has played a trick on me. That's why I ask you to tell me the truth. If you have done nothing wrong, then my vision is false and I had better stop teaching people right now.'

The bhikkhu who had tried to help him urged him to answer. With a trembling voice he said, 'I was a boxer.' He was unable to say anything more than that. The Venerable Acharn asked again, 'But now you are a bhikkhu! How can you be a boxer at the same time? Or did you box your way here and in that way earn money?'

The poor boxer-bhikkhu was now beside himself with fear, and all he could answer to any question was 'Yes, yes, yes'. After this cross-questioning, all that was known about him was that he had been a boxer before ordination but that after that he had given it up completely. Seeing that he was too much terrified, the Venerable Acharn changed the subject saying that it was time to go for alms-food, and he then ordered another bhikkhu to question 'the boxer' more about this later on.

After mealtime, the bhikkhu who was ordered to question him told the Venerable Acharn that 'the boxer' had been a famous boxer in the Suan Kularb camp for many years. Later he had become weary of the life of a layman and after his ordination had set out to seek the Venerable Acharn. Everything seemed to be all right now, since the Venerable Acharn did not mention this matter again that evening after giving him some instruction. But the following morning, the Venerable Acharn, who must have studied him further that night, again said to him that there must be something still hidden. If he had been a boxer only before his ordination, then the vision should not have revealed anything more than that. He must therefore consider this matter again more carefully. After that, the Venerable Acharn again said nothing more.

The bhikkhu who was his helper then went to 'the boxer's' place and told him privately that there still must be something wrong. After some discussion, 'the boxer' showed him the more than ten photographs of different boxing styles and postures which he had brought along with him. Seeing this, the helper bhikkhu realized that they certainly were the cause of the trouble. He advised 'the boxer' to burn them all, and from that time onwards, the case was closed.

The boxer-bhikkhu himself was well-behaved and well-disciplined. He lived a peaceful and happy life after that. The Venerable Acharn also had compassion for him and never said another word about this incident. When later asked by the helper bhikkhu to recall this event, the boxer-bhikkhu said that he was petrified with fear and that he felt as if he would die. He could hear himself stammering out answers like a person in a trance or like someone who had completely lost his self-control.

'Without your help I would have been mad with fear' he said, 'but the Venerable Acharn must also have known this and thus suddenly changed the subject and took no more notice of me.'

The above story is an example of how the Venerable Acharn made use of his meditation-vision in addition to his unique mind-reading ability in dealing with other people.

Vimutti-The Condition Beyond Space and Time

Many of the things which happened to the Venerable Acharn were unprecedented and spectacular, being both mysterious in nature and illimitable in scope. This was especially true while he was staying alone. More dramatic was the fact that this special and unexpected knowledge, call it intuition if you will, sometimes occurred to him during

meditation, whereas at other times it came to him during his normal waking state. It was therefore a wonderful thing that the mind which had been ignorant and blind as to what had been going on all around it now came unexpectedly to know all those happenings. Such things had always been there but it seemed to the mind first knowing them that they had just come into existence. It was only when the mind withdrew into the unshakable state of meditation that such things ceased to insert themselves into his consciousness.

Within such a lofty condition, mind rests with dharma and dharma with mind; mind is dharma and dharma is mind. It is the condition where [or perhaps we can say when] both dharma and mind blend into one [ekibhava], there being no duality, no worldly supposition or worldly definition, no time, space, or aggregates, not even happiness or suffering as they are understood in the worldly sense. As long as the mind does not withdraw from this state, so long will the worldly conditions of changeability, flux, and selflessness not be able to enter to trouble it, no matter whether it is a matter of days, months, years, centuries or millenniums.

This condition is the entire extinction of the mundane world in the sense implied above. Should the mundane, such as the aggregates sustaining the mind during that time, come to dissolution, the mind that is submerged in the Cessation of Suffering would be oblivious to it and become that condition [ekidhamrna-the one] itself. This is, theoretically speaking, showing what is possible. But in the practical sense, that lofty condition is used only for a temporary rest and for refreshment, there being no need for years or centuries of such a submergence. This may be compared to the period of sleep for an ordinary person, during which time he is oblivious to outward circumstances. It is only when he awakens that the mind becomes aware of what stimulates it. But the withdrawal of the mind, be it in the state of ordinary calmness or that of withdrawal into the condition of the extinction of suffering, is still within the realm of the mundane whereas [in this case] the [mind of the] Venerable Acharn had superseded that realm.

When the mind has become absolutely pure, there is nothing of the mundane world that can disturb it. That mind always maintains itself as delivered mind in its capacity as timeless mind. It is beyond space-and-time: beyond the power of words to describe and beyond the power of the ordinary mind to conceptualize or imagine. In that state of quietude where nothing of the mundane can enter, no stimulation or connection is possible, nor is there response. Only when it partly emerges to the second level of meditation can any response or any consciousness [in such a plane] be possible.

As for the Venerable Acharn, his mind was always open to the occurrence of events in the second level of concentration and the ordinary level, the difference being only in the degree of subtlety or thoroughness. When an extensive or detailed account was required, the second level of meditation worked with better efficiency. It can also be used for clairvoyance or clairaudience, the latter being the ability to hear the sound of man or animal [some distance away] or even the voices of invisible beings on different planes. An instance of this will be given in the following experience of the Venerable Acharn himself.

Disguised Tigers

At one time during his wanderings, the Venerable Acharn arrived at a place so deep in the wilds that the hilltribes people there hardly ever saw a dhutanga bhikkhu. Only those

few who had been into a town, and even then once in a very long while, were able to know a little about what a bhikkhu was.

At that time he was accompanied by another bhikkhu. They selected a spot under the trees about two kilometres from the village. Entering the village in the morning for alms-food, the hilltribesmen asked them what it was they wanted. When they replied that they wanted alms-food, the villagers again asked what kind of food they wanted to have. They said that they wanted rice, but the villagers still did not understand whether or not they wanted cooked or uncooked rice. The bhikkhus replied that they wanted it cooked and the villagers gave them some cooked rice and nothing more. The Venerable Acharn and his companion stayed there in this way for many days. The villagers showed them neither respect nor confidence.

One night the village headman sounded the bamboo tube [made resonant and used as a signal for calling the villagers together] and called his people to a meeting. He told them that there were now two tigers disguised as men who had come to stay in a place not far away. He said that he didn't know what kind of tigers they were, but that they looked suspicious. The women and children were therefore forbidden to go near that place, and even the men should go there with tools or weapons, and even then only with some friends. Moreover, he went on, they must be careful, otherwise they would be eaten by these two tigers disguised as men.

While their leader was thus warning his men, the Venerable Acharn was meditating and [by the power of his clairaudience] was able to hear what the headman was saying about him and his friend. He was surprised by this undreamed of accusation and was moved to great pity for them, knowing that many other villagers would believe the headman's words. It was a great evil and danger to themselves since [if they did not change their belief] after their deaths, they would all be born as tigers.

The next day he told his friend that they had been accused of being tigers who had assumed the form of men in order to kill the villagers. 'If we should go away from here now,' said the Venerable Acharn, 'they will all be reborn as tigers after they die. This is serious karma on their part and to help them we should stay here longer, even though it may mean that we will have to suffer privations through their indifference in supporting us.'

After that, there were at times groups of observers from the village stealing around the area where the Venerable Acharn and the other bhikkhu were staying. They came in groups of three or four, carrying with them tools to be used as weapons. For ten or fifteen minutes each group would peer from the bushes or near the track for walking meditation, gazing intently at the Venerable Acharn or the other bhikkhu and looking around the place with suspicion. They never spoke a word. They would then return to the village, only to come again the next day.

For quite some time they observed the Venerable Acharn's manner and seemed to be undecided about him, but all this time they never paid any attention to the needs of their 'disguised tigers', not caring whether or not these so-called tigers were suffering any privations due to their indifference. The villagers didn't seem to care whether or not the two bhikkhus had enough to eat each day, or whether both would be comfortable in their shelters and places for rest. They offered only rice, nothing more, and even then, the amount of rice that was offered was so small that even when mixed with water it was still not enough for each. And as for drinking water, the two bhikkhus had to fetch it

themselves from a stream at the foot of the mountain after they had had their bath. Their sheltering places were beneath the shady branches of trees, which scarcely offered any protection from rain or sun. Since there wasn't any cave or cliff nearby, they weren't able to find any shelters better than that.

On some occasions there were heavy rains. Then they had to collect dry leaves and branches to make a crude lean-to. During the rains, they were forced to sit shivering with cold under their klods with the mosquito-net spread over it. Sometimes, however, there was a strong wind from the mountains and the rain would be blown violently against the mosquito-nets, and even their klods were blown away leaving the two of them soaked to the skin and shivering like leaves. All their bhikkhu requisites were scattered all around, drenched by the rain. In the daytime they would be able to collect them and then hurry to find another shelter, but at night the situation was far worse. It would be pitch-dark in the pelting rain and the howling wind. The thunder was earsplitting and all around them was the thudding of branches broken by the wind crashing to the ground. At such moments, life was exposed to the fury of the elements on all sides.

Such was the ordeal that the Venerable Acharn and his companion underwent in the spirit of self-sacrifice. It was a self-imposed ordeal which they had to endure until the villagers' attitude was softened and they were made to come to their senses.

Even with all these inconveniences and privations, however, it was a suitable place for meditation. There were no other burdens to weigh down the mind. Late at night there was often a symphony of roaring tigers around the area. They were all large, ferocious tigers, and although they roamed about not far away, they hardly ever approached the place where the two bhikkhus were staying. Once in along while, however, one of them would pay a surreptitious visit, perhaps checking to see if there was a meal available there or not, but when the occupant of the klod moved or sat up, it would roar loudly and jump away, never to be seen again.

As for the villagers, their curiosity and apprehension were still strong. They came to observe in a group of three or four every afternoon, but they never spoke a word to the Venerable Acharn, nor he to them. At times they would whisper amongst themselves while watching him, little dreaming that he was able to see or read their every thought and mood, which they were sure no one could possibly know about. The Venerable Acharn was also observing them, and with far better results! He knew that they were continually trying to find fault with himself and with his companion. This made him take great pity on them since they were being misled by their leader and a few others, not knowing what would happen to them as a result.

For months the Venerable Acharn and his companion stayed there and for months the villagers did not give up their attempts to find fault with them. After all was said, their persistent attempts were praise-worthy, but fortunately [for them, of course], they did not try to drive them away. After such a long time of watching and waiting, however, they must themselves have been surprised to discover that no fault could be found with the bhikkhus, despite their keen fault-finding eyes.

One night, during his meditation, the Venerable Acharn heard, or rather knew, by means of his psychic powers that the village headman was asking his groups of observers what faults there were with the two bhikkhus. The observers reported unanimously that they were not able to find any fault whatsoever with the two 'tigers', adding that their own

suspicious might be doing themselves more harm than good. When the headman asked why this was so, they replied that the two bhikkhus hadn't ever done anything suspicious.

'Every time we went there,' they said, 'both bhikkhus were either sitting still with their eyes closed or walking back and forth without looking to the right or to the left. Any disguised tigers coming to devour us would certainly not be doing anything like that. We have watched them for a long time but they have never revealed one single telltale clue. If we keep thinking like this, it might be harmful to us. It would be better if we had a talk with them so that we can know them better.'

This proposal was supported by many, who said that they had been in town and had seen some bhikkhus there and that they thought that these two bhikkhus were good and reliable ones. They said that they were impressed in their demeanour rather than bent on finding fault with them. After the meeting, it was agreed that they would go to see the Venerable Acharn and ask him what was the purpose of his sitting and what he was looking for while walking back and forth. Having known this, the Venerable Acharn told his companion that the villagers would come to see them soon. One afternoon, a number of the villagers came, just as he had said. One of them asked him why he sat still and what was he looking for while walking back and forth.

'My buddho is lost,' said the Venerable Acharn; 'I sit and walk in order to find buddho.'

'What on earth is buddho?' they asked. 'Can we help you find it?'

'Oh yes, you all can,' replied the Venerable Acharn. 'Buddho is the only priceless gem in all the three worlds. Buddho is all-knowing. It would be better if you would help me try to find buddho, for then we can find buddho sooner.'

'How long ago did you lose your buddho?'

'Not very long ago, and with your help we can find it much sooner.'

'How big is this priceless gem of buddho?' the villagers asked.

'Not so big and not so small,' he said. 'The size is proper to both you and to me. Whoever finds buddho is superior in the world, for he can see everything.'

'Can he see heaven and hell?'

'Certainly, if he knows how to find buddho. Otherwise, how could we say that buddho is priceless and superior?'

'Can we see our children or husbands and wives who are dead?'

'Of course,' he replied. 'You can see everything and everyone when you have found buddho.'

'Has buddho any light?'

'Yes, buddho has a very bright light, far brighter than hundreds or thousands of suns, for the suns cannot make you see heaven and hell, but buddho can.'

'Can women and children help you find buddho?'

'Yes, everyone can.'

'In what way is buddho priceless or superior? Can it help protect us from ghosts and demons?'

'Buddho is priceless and superior in so many ways that it is uncountable. The three worlds of sensuality, form, and formlessness have to prostrate before buddho. Nothing can be superior to buddho. Ghosts and demons are very much afraid of buddho. They are afraid of those who begin to look for buddho even though they haven't yet found it.'

'What colour is the gem of buddho?'

'In the bright light of buddho there are so many colours that they cannot be counted. Buddho is the priceless treasure of the Buddha. Buddho is the source of knowledge and brilliancy. Buddho is not matter. The Buddha gave it to us a long time ago but we do not find it now. But it is not important where buddho is. If you really want to find buddho, you must sit or walk repeating to yourselves buddho, buddho, buddho. During this time you must not think of anything else. Let your thought dwell in buddho inside you. If you can do this, then you might be able to find buddho.'

'But how long shall we have to sit or walk to find buddho?'

'At the outset, fifteen or twenty minutes is enough. Buddho does not want us to hurry, for then we shall be tired and cannot find buddho. This is enough for today.'

After this ingenious instruction, the villagers returned to their village. They didn't tell him they were leaving. They just got up and went away. To them there was no saying goodbye. At the village they were questioned in earnest by the others who had remained behind. They repeated the Venerable Achar's instruction and said that he and his bhikkhu companion were not tigers in disguise as they had at first suspected. The villagers took great interest in his instruction and before long they were all reciting buddho with earnestness, from the headman down to the women and children who knew how to recite mentally.

The Venerable Acharn's instruction produced wonderful results much sooner than anyone would have expected. Not long after that, there was a man who was able to find buddho through the Venerable Acharn's ingenious method. He said that he was rewarded with a blissful peace soon after he faithfully followed that method. According to him, about four or five days before that achievement he dreamt of the Venerable Acharn, who had come to put a big candle with a bright flame on his head. In his dream he was very glad that he was able to produce a light strong enough to penetrate the darkness so many metres from his body. When later he attained to that blissful peace, he came to see the Venerable Acharn and related to him both his dream and his wonderful achievement. The Venerable Acharn then taught him a more advanced practice and told him to make more effort. He followed the Venerable Acharn's instruction carefully and soon won a higher attainment with the additional power of mind-reading, through which he was able to know how much a person's mind was defiled or purified. When later he came to see the Venerable Acharn, he spoke out frankly, as is the habit of hill people, that he had observed the minds of both the Venerable Acharn and his companion and now knew them very well.

'Then what is my mind like?' the Venerable Acharn asked playfully. 'Is it evil?'

'What,' the old man replied instantly, 'your mind is freed of whatever spot of defilement. It is bathed in a wonderful light within. You are superior in the world. I have never seen anything like this. You have already stayed here a long time! Why did you not teach us the first time you arrived here?'

'But how could I?' he replied. 'None of you had ever come to ask me.'

'But I didn't know that you were a holy man, otherwise I would have come long before this. Now we know how wise you are. When you were asked why you sat still and what you were looking for while walking back and forth, you said that buddho was lost and asked us to help you find buddho. When asked what buddho was, you said that buddho was a bright gem. In reality, your mind was already buddho, but you wanted to make our minds as bright as yours. Now we know that you are holy and wise. You didn't want us to help you find buddho for you. You wanted to help us find buddho for ourselves!'

The news of that man's attainment in the dharma spread throughout the village. Everyone became more interested in reciting buddho and consequently they became more interested in the Venerable Acharn. And from that time on, the case of the two 'tigers' was completely forgotten.

Every morning the Venerable Acharn and his companion would be followed by that man who came to carry his bowl for him and to learn more dharma from him. Even when he had other business to do, he would ask some other person to tell the Venerable Acharn about his business. There were several other persons, both men and women, who were advanced in meditation practice, but the first man who attained to the dharma appeared to be the best of all.

Now that they had a correct attitude of mind towards the Venerable Acharn, everything changed automatically. Formerly the villagers had never taken any interest in whether the two bhikkhus would eat or sleep, live or die. Once they realized who he was, however, they were earnest in his welfare and comfort. Sheltering places for eating, sleeping and walking meditation were all neatly constructed without a word of request by the Venerable Acharn. They also complained lovingly to him, saying how he managed to walk like a wild hog on a track that was entangled with undergrowth.

'You even said that this was the track for seeking buddho.' they said, 'and you told us you were sitting and walking in order to find buddho! How strange you are, and how different from other people! You are supreme in the world and yet you don't boast about it. We like you very much. Your bed is nothing but dried leaves and it is now rotting. How can you have lived with it for so many months? It's like a sleeping place for pigs. It makes our hearts sink. We were so foolish, all of us. How blind we were! Some even accused you of being tigers in disguise, but now they have all changed their minds. We told them all about you.'

His Dramatic Departure

The respect and reverence of the hilltribes people were strong and sincere, and, what is more important, absolute. They were able to sacrifice their lives for one whom they

respected. Whatever the Venerable Acharn said thereafter was listened to with reverence and followed with devotion. He taught them more advanced lessons in meditation than the recitation of buddho, and with time they were able to progress further. The Venerable Acharn and his companion thus spent the Rains' Retreat with them for their sakes.

The two bhikkhus had arrived at their village in early February and they took their leave in April of the following year, having stayed with the villagers for more than one year. His departure, however, became a dramatic, tearful scene, for they would not allow him to leave. They said that if even he should die there, they would be very happy to arrange for his funeral. They were whole-heartedly dedicated to him. This reveals how they were able to admit their faults and rectify themselves. They were able to know that he was truly a holy man and asked him to forgive them their evil towards him.

Before leaving them he said to his companion that now that they were then saved from their own evil karma, they were free to go on. But it was by no means easy for him to do so, for once they knew that he wanted to leave them, they all swarmed out of the village and wept bitterly before him, imploring him not to go away. It was as if they were grieving over someone's death. Their lamentation was touching and their entreaties were pathetic and heart-rending. With consolatory words he tried to reason with them, explaining how he had to go and that they should not surrender themselves to grief, which would do them no good.

When they appeared to have calmed down a little, he collected his requisites and started to walk away from the comfortable shelters. And then an unexpected thing happened. Both children and adults thronged around him, some embracing his legs with tearful faces trying to drag him back, others pulled his robes with the same intention, and still others snatched his klod, alms-bowl and water kettle from the one who was to accompany him for a distance. The scene was like one of small children crying for their father and refusing to let him go away from them. He had to return and spend more time in consoling them and alleviating their sorrow with various reasons. It took him quite a long time before they would allow him to go, and even then he was able to walk only a few metres before they were once again beside themselves with grief and scurried after him to pull him back. They all burst into tears, clinging to his legs and robes more tightly than before. This time it took him several hours of consoling and reasoning, for the scene had become one of pandemonium, with the weeping and wailing, sobbing and screaming of children and grown-ups alike.

'Please come back to us again,' they sobbed mournfully. 'Don't stay away for a long time. We will miss you so much. Our hearts are already breaking.' Such were the pitiful cries of the villagers who tearfully implored the Venerable Acharn to come back to them. Men, women and children moaned out their pleas for his mercy, fearing that he was leaving them forever.

He had arrived at their village amidst suspicious fear and dissatisfaction but departed from it amidst the heartbroken tears on the part of those who had accused him and his companion of having been disguised tigers. This is really befitting a follower of the Tathagata whose responsibility it is to cleanse the people's minds of their contaminations and transform them into priceless treasures for themselves and for others. This is responsibility based on loving-kindness which is never disturbed by others' misunderstandings, suspicions or ill-will. Such loving-kindness is the haven and the refuge of all beings in distress everywhere.

Repentance and Regret Do Not Pay

While listening to his narration, his listeners couldn't help but picture the tearful scene of the poor villagers who would not let the Venerable Acharn leave them, and who, having failed to dissuade him, pitifully implored him to return to them for a visit. Such people, being unsophisticated and unspoiled, were devotedly impressed in him and would have willingly sacrificed everything they had for his sake. Like children affectionately attached to their mother or father, they embraced his legs, pulled his robes, and wrung their hands, all feeling as though their hearts would truly break at his imminent departure. There was the track for walking meditation which they had cleared for him and there the thatched-roofed shelters they had built. It was the best that they were able to do and that was also the best for him.

From then on he would no more be seen, but such is the condition of the law of change which governs the world, which manifests itself now and again in the form of departure and bereavement. It is expected that it must take place sooner or later, there being no force capable of counteracting it. And as for the Venerable Acharn, there was no dissuading him, although he realized the grief his departure would cause the villagers. [He had saved them from their evil thoughts and established them in the right path.] Now it was time for him to push on, to be of assistance to others who, like them, could be saved. This is a characteristic of the Noble Disciple who is referred to in Pali passages as punnakkhettain lokassa - the excellent field for the world to sow the seeds of merit on.

This story may give us Buddhists a valuable lesson in that what is happening to Buddhism now appears to be somewhat like what had happened to the Venerable Acharn at that time. We know how Buddhism is being tacitly regarded as, comparatively speaking, 'a tiger in disguise by a circle of people who, like the villagers in the story, have been misled and therefore victimized by their own self-delusion. This may bring about an overt [as well as covert] attempt to destroy the dharma. It is this situation which is happening to Buddhism at large and should Buddhists as a whole prefer to be apathetically indifferent and remain passive, there will be only repentance and regret, which do not pay.

Assistance Rendered in Depth and Width

The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun's mode of living conformed to that of the Well-Gone [sugato]. His selfless assistance was given vertically and horizontally, as it were. At his sylvan retreat in the wilds he gave his instruction not only to the hill people but also to such invisible beings as ghosts, demons, terrestrial and celestial angels and the higher angels called Brahma, while in towns he was approached by both bhikkhus and laymen, rich and poor, young and old, wherever he stayed. Throughout the long years of his instructing and training those dedicated to the practical aspect of dharma, there is no telling how many of them benefited from his impressive instruction and mode of training and guidance. This is not to mention the uncountable numbers of invisible beings of various kinds. It is not an exaggeration to say that there is hardly anyone in these modern times who is able to do as he did.

While staying in the forest or mountain regions, the hilltribes people were bathed in the radiance of his instruction in the afternoon. Late at night he often shouldered the task of

answering questions and giving instruction to terrestrial and celestial angels from the various planes of consciousness. This was such a profound and difficult task that there were few of his disciples who would have been able to be of help to him. This mode of instruction was not in any way like that of teaching human beings in which it was obvious who would be able to be helped by some of his disciples. His connection with such invisible beings constituted an essential part of the record of his assistance, and in describing his life, such a connection is indispensable and cannot be omitted.

The Influence of His Scrutinizing Eye

Not long ago the writer went to see a Venerable Acharn with high attainment who is well-known far and wide as a Meditation Master. He is respected by bhikkhus, samaneras, and lay disciples from nearly all parts of the country. At that time he was having a conversation with a number of his bhikkhu disciples within the monastery and the writer was kindly welcomed and also allowed to join in the informal conversation. We talked about a number of practical topics until we came to the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun who was his Meditation Master. According to his narrative, the Venerable Acharn was at that time staying in a remote village in the wilds of Chiangmai, a distance of about two or three days' walk from the town. Many of his accounts were surprisingly remarkable and wonderful, but only some of them will be related here.

According to this Meditation Master, the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun, besides having attained to absolute purity beyond doubt, was also endowed with several other unique qualities which were to his disciples at once respectful, fearful and impressive. His disciples who stayed with him had to be strictly self-controlled in thoughts and moods as well as in words and deeds.

'Whatever I thought was no secret to him,' this Meditation Master said. 'I felt as if I were being bound day and night with mind-control. And yet, the thoughts were often made known to myself and others later on. But it was my own fault since very often my mind was fond of playing truant. You know how fleeting the mind is. It flashes this way and that every moment of the day and night. I was often absent-minded and that was why I was often scolded. What is more important, some thoughts I had already forgotten, but he was still able to remind me of them.'

'Did he scold you?' the writer asked.

'Yes, sometimes,' the Meditation Master answered, 'but at other times he only warned me, taking my thought as the topic of instruction for myself and the others. I couldn't help feeling ashamed. Whenever there were others listening, however, he rarely mentioned names, but only referred to the thoughts and explained how improper they were.'

'What, did you think it was that made the Venerable Acharn scold you?'

'Why everything! In this respect I think the worldling is really a daredevil, never being afraid of the consequences of his own thoughts. In my case, it was the topics which he never wanted his disciples to think about. That was why he sternly reproached me.'

'Were you much afraid of him?'

'Why shouldn't I have been? The body looked calm and indifferent but the mind was trembling like anything. Sometimes I was even breathless. That is why I do not doubt his ability to know our every thought which he could read like a book.

'One night I was thinking about going some place, to see different places. When I went to attend upon the Venerable Acharn in the morning, he promptly made that thought the topic of instruction and forbade me to go anywhere, saying that his instruction was more enjoyable than going to other places. He appeared to be much concerned about the condition of my mind, perhaps being afraid that it would fall victim to evil influences.

'He often warned me and chided me. What I was very much afraid of was that I wouldn't be able to escape his scrutinizing eye day or night. Whenever I had calmed my mind down, it seemed as though he were already watching me, as if he never slept at all. Some nights I dared not go to sleep for I always sensed that he was sitting in front of me, staring at me all the time.

'You see, every movement of body and mind must always be under strict control. While following after him going for alms-food, all of us could not be without mindfulness. We had to take care not to let the mind stray out of the body, otherwise, back at the monastery, or sometimes on our way back, we would be strongly scolded. In being disciplined in this way we were bound to develop mindfulness and have the mind traverse only within the body day and night. But in a gathering of many disciples, every day there was at least one who had failed to do so at one time or another. And you can be sure that it was like a boomerang which came back to its owner when we listened to his instruction at meeting-time. After his instruction we usually whispered to one another in order to find out who it was and it would not be long before someone would confess his mistake, admitting that it was he who was being referred to a moment ago. It was because of this that we had to be strictly self-controlled under his guidance and training.'

Ruthlessly Hitting at the Ego

The first time this same Meditation Master arrived in Chiangmai, he went to stay at Wat Chedi Luang. He was there for less than one hour when he saw a car pulling into the monastery compound and which stopped in front of his kuti [bhikkhu's shelter]. On looking to see who it was, he saw that it was the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun sitting in the car. He went down to greet the Venerable Acharn and asked him how it was that he came to be there. The Venerable Acharn said that he had come to receive him! He asked the Venerable Acharn if anyone had told him of his arrival and he was told no and that if he wanted to come and receive him, then he would come. On hearing this, the Meditation Master began to be afraid of the Venerable Acharn, fearing that he would be able to read his every thought and scold him later on. This is in fact exactly what happened when this Meditation Master went to stay with the Venerable Acharn who never failed to scold him harshly whenever he was lax in self-control.

While listening to the Venerable Acharn's sermons, those listeners who had a genuine desire to seek the dharma, not being obsessed by vanity and egotism, would be greatly delighted and absorbed in it since what he said was pure dharma, impressive and delightful to the heart. But if any of them cherished any evil desire and were bent on finding fault with him, his sermon would soon become heated and consume like fire. What resulted was that such people were consumed by the fire of their own evil intention. The Venerable Acharn took no interest as to whether or not his sermon would

hit or hurt the ego of anyone. Wherever there was defilement or ego, there he hit ruthlessly with the dharma and would not change the subject. Sometimes [but very rarely] he even mentioned names, saying, 'You, bhikkhu so-and-so, were wrong in thinking like that last night during your meditation practice. From now on you must change it. Now you, bhikkhu so-and-so, were again wrong in thinking such-and-such. If you don't want to invite ruin, you must stop such destructive thoughts. Why don't you think about what the Buddha urged you to think about? This is the place for developing the mind and morality, not a place for developing such thoughts which will only consume you.'

Those who genuinely sought the dharma would be relieved and would feel themselves improved by his stern warnings, which in fact he would give only when there was a seriously evil thought which would be detrimental to the person himself. But to those few who stealthily cherished ill-will against him, he would sense it long before and then the fire of their evil intention would bounce back and consume them. If, however, there was a feeling of repentance and an asking for forgiveness on the part of those who harboured such evil thoughts, then the fire would be extinguished and everything would be all right.

Dethroning the Ghosts

One night a group of hilltribes people said that now that there was a great Acharn dwelling with them, they wondered if he had any *gatha* [verse from the scriptures] to give them as a protection against ghosts and demons. They decided to go and ask him about it the following morning. The Venerable Acharn, by means of his clairvoyance, knew this and told the bhikkhus about what he had heard.

The following morning the villagers came to see him and asked for the *gatha* which would protect them from ghosts and demons. He told them to recite the words *buddho*, *dhammo* or *sangho* mentally, saying that no ghost or demon would be able to withstand the power of these words. They followed his instruction faithfully, not knowing that it was his ingenious method for practicing meditation. The result was not long in coming, for the next morning they hastened to see him and reported what had happened to them the previous night when their minds were able to withdraw into the state of one-pointedness. He confirmed that what they were doing was correct because the ghosts and demons, being greatly frightened by the power of these words, would be trying to escape.

'From now on you mustn't be afraid of ghosts and demons,' he said. 'They have run away. And even for those who have not achieved such results, ghosts and demons were also frightened the minute they heard these words.' He advised them to carry on such a recitation every day from then on.

These hilltribes people were by nature honest and docile. There followed amazing results to such an extent that their minds became brilliant and enabled them to know others' minds, including those of the bhikkhus in the monastery where the Venerable Acharn was staying. The same thing had already happened to the man in the village of the 'disguised tigers', as has already been told. They soon came to the Venerable Acharn and told him of their wonderful results. This took some bhikkhus by surprise²⁹ who were

²⁹ A similar story is also reported in the time of the Buddha in the Dhammapada, where it is mentioned that a woman lay disciple was able to read others' minds. Some bhikkhus were

afraid that those lay devotees would be able to read their minds, especially knowing that sometimes they couldn't help thinking about something which was not appropriate as far as the bhikkhuhood was concerned. They then asked those hilltribes people in detail about their achievements, more out of fear that they would steal into their minds than in the desire to know about the technique of their achievement. Being sincere and unsophisticated, they spoke frankly to the bhikkhus and did not bother to mince words. Unlike townspeople, they did not like concealing the facts and putting on a show to disguise their feelings in order to be polite. This became the irrefutable proof of their achievement since it served to convince the bhikkhus whose minds were read the night before beyond a doubt. The hilltribes people also spoke frankly to the Venerable Acharn, saying that they knew well the condition of his mind, since they had read his before any of the others. Asked what it was like and whether or not it was afraid of ghosts, they smiled and said, 'His mind is above the world. It is not afraid of anything. It is supreme.'

From that time onwards, ghosts and demons became meaningless and all the people of that village turned to the Venerable Acharn and the dharma for their refuge. Those who had made any attainment told their tribe about it and all were faithful and obedient to the Venerable Acharn's instructions. When it was time to offer alms-food in the morning, they would gather together in the same place and on having done so, the Venerable Acharn would tell them to utter their word of sadhu [in appreciation of each others' merit] loudly and to a man. This was so that the invisible beings would also rejoice in their good deeds and share in the merit they had done. This they gladly did every day.

His Extensive Help in Chiangmai, Especially to Invisible Beings

It may be noted here that while in Chiangmai, the Venerable Acharn gave more assistance to terrestrial and celestial angels than to human beings, ghosts, demons and nagas. Perhaps one reason is that there was scarcely anyone who had the ability to give such assistance as he was able to do. And then, he was one of the few, if any, whom the angels looked up to as their Refuge. In fact, these angels used to complain to him about the ignorance and indifference of human beings who are so blind and biased to their existence, and who appear to take delight in denying them their right to exist. When once in a long while they meet a person who accepts their right and dignity and who is able to communicate with them directly, it is just natural that they should be overwhelmed with delight and be reverently attracted to him. That was why they often approached him for instructions and questions. This was so that they could drink the elixir of dharma to refresh their being and prolong their lives.

It is the person blessed with attainment in the dharma that the angels look up to and worship as their Master. The Venerable Acharn also said that the number of invisible beings on the various planes of consciousness coming for his help and rescue far outnumbered that of human beings. This, of course, referred to those who were in a position to struggle and come to see him themselves [and this is not to mention those in

afraid that she would be able to read their minds because they knew that sometimes they couldn't help thinking indecent or obscene thoughts. It appears that lay disciples or those with little academic knowledge but much obedience and faith, are better able to develop psychic abilities than bhikkhus or learned men with academic distinction. Their intellectual knowledge seems to stand in the way of their own attainment of these special powers. Even in the attainment of insight meditation, they often proved to be no match for the humble, unsophisticated lay devotees. Examples of this still abound in Thailand today.

miserable conditions not able to come, who certainly far outnumbered those who did come]. However, this aspect of assistance is still less than obvious and is therefore mysterious for those who cannot do likewise [and also for those who find it impossible or absurd]. It will never be accepted or recognized by society [which is material-minded]. But in a developed society, this is almost possible, and to the Venerable Acharn, this was commonplace. Wherever he stayed, there he had an inevitable meeting with such beings who came to seek his help more often than in other places, especially when he was staying in a remote place in the wilds where he had little to do with other human beings.

A Visit by Angels from Germany

The following account is unique since it is concerned with angels from Germany who also visited him for a sermon while he was staying in the wilds of Chiangmai in a village named Ekoh of the Muser hilltribes people. They said that their purpose in coming was to listen to a sermon concerning the subject of Victory. He let his mind focus on a theme suitable to them and in a moment there appeared the verse *akkodhena jine kotham* - anger is defeated by non-anger. He explained it to them saying that 'Non-anger or non-violence is the practice which one who hopes for victory should cultivate. That world peace has been achieved to the extent that it has is because of this dharma which has counteracted the power of anger and hatred in the societies of human beings and angels. Angels should also develop this virtue as a binding force within their society. Without this dharma, at the very least the world would not know peace, and at the very most, it would be destroyed.

'Never can the world gain a victory over enemies, whether internal or external, far or near, in narrower or broader circles, through the power of anger, which serves only to destroy oneself and others. The more the force of anger is applied, the greater the heat produced, and the sooner will the world be destroyed by the resulting conflagration. This is because anger itself is by nature a fire with destructive power. This fire can never be used for cooking purposes, since its heat cannot be used towards any constructive end. One who wants to make the world a hospitable place to live in should be mindful of the evils of anger as the most destructive of fires, and to never allow it to consume himself and others.

'The world's existence is supported by loving-kindness. It is destroyed by violence through anger or greed, which are insatiable and which produce an endless vicious cycle. The Buddha, having seen the evils of anger and the benefits of loving-kindness, proclaimed his message for the sake of beings who are united in the experience of suffering and the goal of the Cessation of Suffering. As long as the world is supported by loving-kindness, so long will the world be blessed with peace and happiness. But when there is no loving-kindness present in the minds of people, there can be no security and peace in any society, and this despite the vast amounts of luxuries and the innumerable devices to produce happiness. What results is nothing but trouble and turmoil everywhere. A wise man who knows the value of dharma and the evils of the fires of the defilements should attempt to smother or put out such a fire while it is still possible to do so. To be heedless of it is to waste the opportunity and bring it to the point of being too late to do anything about it.'

At the end of the sermon a thundering appreciation was given in the utterance of the word *sadhu*. He asked them how they knew that he was here since they lived in a place

geographically quite some distance away. They told him that knowing where he was was no difficulty for them at all, for between the angels of the two countries there was regular communication. Moreover, there was no obstacle or barrier between both countries in the sense understood by human beings, since no vehicles were needed in their comings and goings. One moment of thought was enough to bring them to the places where they intended to go. In this respect it was far more convenient than communication or transportation in the world of human beings.

The Venerable Acharn said that the angels from Germany often came to listen to his sermons in the same way as the terrestrial angels from the various parts of Thailand. It is worth noting that the manner of paying homage to him was very much alike despite their differences in the planes of consciousness. While coming to see him, they would not pass through the area where the bhikkhus were staying but would enter from the direction where no one was staying. Moreover, they usually came late at night when the atmosphere was quiet and when the bhikkhus had gone to rest. Having arrived, they would circumambulate him three times, keeping him on their right side. They were all modest and self-controlled, and on departing, they would repeat their circumambulation and draw back for some distance until they were outside the area where he and the other bhikkhus were staying. They would then soar into the air like wisps of cotton blown up by the wind. Such was how the angels paid homage to him³⁰.

The Life-Blood of Dhutanga Bhikkhus

The atmosphere of his sylvan retreats in Chiangmai, and the places themselves, was healthy and comfortable. His body was refreshed while life lasted. Meditation hours were regular and undisturbed. His assistance to the angels, regularly done at night, was not so much a burden, since the trainees were sufficiently developed and did not come with a fault-finding purpose. To the people he gave instruction in the afternoon or evening, whereas for his own bhikkhus there were occasional meetings for instruction which he gave at around seven o'clock in the evening. Most of them were already far advanced in the dharma, from meditation to wisdom, all being dedicated to attainment and listening attentively as a method of exertion for the sake of the Cessation of Suffering while listening.

His instruction under such circumstances to such listeners was specially adapted, beginning with meditation, on to wisdom, and then on to the most profound stage of Deliverance. So delightful and absorbing was his instruction every time that his listeners would be spellbound, oblivious to the passing of time, and even of their own bodies. His instruction in this practical aspect would last two hours at the least, but there would be no feeling of fatigue or stiffness of body on the part of his bhikkhu listeners, whose realization would be steadily advanced from that of the previous time. This was why listening to the instruction was to them a practical aspect of exertion, self-control and self-observation, no less significant than other aspects of exertion, such as walking or sitting meditation.

The instructor had no other intention than to make the listeners understand, referring to the conditions of their minds which sometimes manifested samudaya [i.e., wrong, producing more suffering or delusion instead of less] and at other times magga [i.e., right,

³⁰ Unlike man, these angels did not prefer to prostrate themselves three times. Instead they chose to circumambulate him three times, which requires more time, more effort and more self-control.

producing less suffering and more insight]. This was pointing out the negative and positive aspects, the evils to be avoided and the benefits to be cultivated right at that moment. His listeners, dwelling on the substance of the instruction with their thoughts under the control of mindfulness and wisdom, usually gained higher meditation and more profound insight. In this manner their minds became more developed with every instruction which was given. Last time the understanding of one point was advanced, whereas this time the realization of another point was strengthened, each time bringing with it a greater depth of mindfulness and wisdom.

Minds were thus steadily developed in both meditation and wisdom with each and every instruction delivered by the instructor who himself had realized what he taught and who pointed out in depth nothing but the truth from his own realization and attainment. Hence the significance of listening to the instructions, which contributed essentially to the achievement of the goal of the dhutanga bhikkhus no less than other aspects of exertion. This again points to the greater importance of a competent Acharn or Meditation Master, to whom the dhutanga bhikkhus were affectionately dedicated and whom they looked up to as their refuge next to the Triple Gem. He was their life, his instructions their life-blood. The means and methods prescribed by him were most faithfully followed. In case of doubt or a problem arising during meditation, his advice was earnestly sought and respectfully heeded. It was because of this fact that dhutanga bhikkhus were to be found in great numbers gathered around a Meditation Master for the sake of his training and guidance. This was to be seen in the cases of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun and Phra Acharn Sao, each having a great band of dhutanga bhikkhu disciples, especially in the Northeastern provinces.

In the early period of his stay in Chiangmai, however, the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun had made up his mind to live in absolute seclusion in order to intensify his efforts for the sake of the final goal. Before that time he was often heard to say that his ability was not yet enough even after he had attained to the third stage of Enlightenment, the Non-returner, at Sarika. Cave, but after his period of solitary life of intensified effort, he was never heard to say it again. During his lifetime he was known to have had a great number of disciples, bhikkhus and laymen, from nearly all parts of the country.

Adventure with an Elephant

One time, when the Venerable Acharn was wandering with two disciples, the Venerable Phra Acham Maha Thongsukh of Wat Suddhavas in the town of Sakol Nakhorn, and the Venerable Phra Acharn Khao of Wat Tharn Klong Phane, they reached a mountain, and at the narrow pass leading up to the summit stood a large elephant with long fearful tusks blocking their way. There wasn't any other way to go around the elephant, and though it appeared to be a domestic one, it stood threateningly in front of them with its owner nowhere to be seen. After some consultation, the Venerable Acharn told Phra Acharn Khao to address the elephant, asking it to give way to them. The elephant was then eating bamboo leaves about five metres from them, and since its back was to the bhikkhus, it didn't see them. The Venerable Phra Acham Khao then addressed the elephant, saying, 'My big brother! I would like to talk to you.' Perhaps the elephant didn't quite hear him, but it suddenly stopped eating. When Phra Acham Khao repeated himself, it turned around and faced the three bhikkhus, still unmoving, but with ears spread in full alert for any danger.

Phra Acham Khao again said, 'My big brother! I would like to talk to you. You are big and

powerful. We are bhikkhus, being powerless and much afraid of you, big brother. We want to go past you and would be thankful if you would give way to us. As long as you stand there like that, we are much afraid and dare not go forward.'

Upon hearing this, the elephant turned back towards the bamboo clump and put his long tusks into it, showing the bhikkhus that they could pass by him without his harming them. The Venerable Acharn said that they were now permitted to go, and they walked one after another in a line about half a metre from the elephant, the Venerable Acharn walking in the middle with Acharn Khao taking the lead and Phra Acharn Thongsukh bringing up the rear, but before they had passed beyond the elephant, the hook on the top of Phra Maha Thongsukh's klod caught on the tangled twigs of the bamboo branches. They had to come back and watch him disentangle the hook from the twigs, which took several minutes, and he began to sweat all over in fear lest the elephant, who was all this time watching him, change his mind. While disentangling the hook, Phra Maha Thongsukh also stole a glance at the elephant, who was standing like a big doll, and beheld eyes which were crystal clear, more lovely than frightening. At that moment, however, he couldn't help feeling uneasy, shivering with apprehension. It was not until the hook was disentangled and all three were at a safe distance beyond the elephant that he thought that those eyes indeed were lovely!

When they had walked a little further, the Venerable Phra Acharn Khao turned back to the elephant and said, 'My big brother! We are past you now. You may feel free to go on with your eating.' Suddenly, the huge tusks were drawn out of the bamboo clump and the elephant breathed heavily through its trunk.

Later, at their shelter, the bhikkhus commented upon the elephant, saying that it was really a lovely animal, only that it couldn't speak like a human being. Phra Maha Thongsukh asked the Venerable Acharn whether or not he had read the elephant's mind while they were walking by,

'When that elephant first heard Phra Acharn Khao's voice and suddenly turned towards us, I thought he was going to charge us,' Phra Maha Thongsukh said. 'He looked terrifying with his ears standing out and with his huge tusks, so menacing. But after understanding our purpose, he became almost a human being in the form of an animal and put his tusks into the bamboo clump as if to say, "You small brothers can pass by now. I have put away all my weapons."' Then he said jokingly to Phra Acharn Khao, 'How clever you were, speaking to the elephant as if it were a human being, and making him our big brother! But big brother was so easily flattered. He seemed to be proud of his new title and promptly lived up to it. But the smallest brother was very careless and let the hook of his klod get caught on the bamboo branches. How frightened I was while trying to get the hook untangled, fearing that big brother would change his mind.'

Hearing this joke, the Venerable Acharn laughed a hearty laugh and said, 'Why should I not have read his mind? It was a matter of life and death. Even in small matters such as the birds and monkeys, I also sometimes read their thoughts.'

'What did he think of us?' Phra Maha Thongsukh asked.

'Well, at first he was frightened at being addressed and put up a show as if to fight. But on seeing the colour of our robes he knew that we were harmless to him. He was used to seeing this colour and his owner had taught him not to be afraid of it. When he heard Acharn Khao calling him big brother, he was more than satisfied.'

'Did it know what it was he said to him?'

'Why not? If he couldn't, his owner would not have put him to work lumbering in the forest. This elephant must have been at least 100 years old. Just look at his tusks, they must have been about two metres long. He must have lived with beings for quite a long time. His owner must be much younger than he is. That's why he was able to understand human language.'

'What was he thinking when he put his tusks in the bamboo clump?'

'He just gave us the right of way.'

'Did the Venerable Acharn read his mind while we were walking past him?'

'Of course I did, and I saw that he was only too willing to let us pass by.'

'But I was afraid that he might change his mind and charge us, at least for amusement.'

'There you are, distracted by your own wild thoughts,' the Venerable Acharn reproached him. 'If your mind would be equally industrious and tireless in thinking about the truth it would be far better for yourself, but such is the habit of most people. They like to cherish thoughts that only cause them trouble and then neglect to think about the truth. What do you want to do now, linger on this thought of the elephant all night and pay no attention to the dharma whatsoever?'

Phra Maha Thongsukh kept silent, knowing that he himself was wrong. This account was related by Phra Maha Thongsukh.

The Case of a Bhikkhu Given to Prattling

Those who were given to prattling or talking without restraint were always sternly reprobated by the Venerable Acharn with the result that some were later known to have gone insane. An example of this can be seen in the case of a bhikkhu who stayed with him for a time. This bhikkhu had a habit of repeating immediately whatever it was the Acharn had said. During the first few days he was warned to mind his own business, i.e., his own mind-control, instead of taking interest in others' affairs. Bhikkhus practicing the dharma must be mindful in observing their own faults expressed through their own minds. But the Venerable Acharn's warning seemed to fall on deaf ears, for that bhikkhu was still not able to rectify his fault. The climax of the story happened one morning while the Venerable Acharn was leading his bhikkhus into a village for alms-food as usual.

The Venerable Acharn had a remarkable habit of often taking whatever he came across on the way as the topic of dharma and made it an on-the-way instruction to the bhikkhus following behind. That morning he saw a pretty calf romping about its mother. On seeing the bhikkhus it suddenly became frightened and rushed to its mother to take shelter under her neck. In that position it looked as if it were shouldering the cow on its own neck. But the cow, being used to seeing bhikkhus, was not disturbed, whereas all this time the calf still looked at them with suspicion and fear. This prompted the Venerable Acharn to point out this difference to the bhikkhus, saying that whereas the mother was not disturbed in the least, the calf was quite frightened, otherwise it would not have shouldered its mother like that.

'Human beings are the same,' the Venerable Acharn went on. 'They must find shelter in

someone, be that person a mother, a father, or whoever is near. While young they need shelter and protection of one kind. Having grown up they still need protection but of another kind, and even in old age they still have to depend on others outside them. There are few who ever try to be their own shelter and protection. People such as these are continually enfeebled by this lack of self dependence. However old they are and wherever they stay, they just cannot help surrendering themselves to someone else. It's the same with bhikkhus, many of whom are shamelessly helpless and are always depending on others' help. They are lazy and are afraid of the suffering that would arise in doing good. Such bhikkhus are like those breathing through another's nostrils, and who cannot realize the truth of the Buddha's saying "atta hi attano natho - everyone is his own refuge." We Buddhists should try our best to breathe through our own nostrils so that we can be independent. Whatever a teacher advises and instructs should be pondered upon and faithfully followed. In this way we shall not always be dependent on him and shall one day become a Noble Disciple who can completely rely on himself.'

This instruction was given on the way to the village and when the Venerable Acharn paused for a moment, the bhikkhu who was often scolded by him started babbling again, repeating the words of the instruction without consideration of decency or obedience. This was something which had never before happened in his circle of disciples. The Venerable Acharn turned back and reprimanded the babbling bhikkhu, saying, 'You could be mad now. You look as if you were a mad dog biting at anything and everything thrown to you. Why don't you look back at your own mind? If you continue being a windbag like this, you will certainly go mad very soon! The Venerable Acharn stopped and said nothing more. The face of that bhikkhu now defied description. He was left speechless. At meal-time he ate only a little. The other bhikkhus, seeing this, dared not speak with him for fear that he would be more ashamed or embarrassed. That day he was not disturbed since the others thought it would be better to leave him alone. But at night he was heard shouting and shrieking to himself in his own place. The other bhikkhus then rushed to see what had happened to him and they found him struggling like a patient in a delirium mumbling vaguely about something which was later made out to the effect that he was sorry to have been so rude to the Venerable Acharn.

Everyone was filled with awe at this sight and later some villagers had to be called to bring medicine. After having given him some medicine and massaging his limbs, he calmed down and was able to sleep until the following morning. Then he was sent to a doctor for more treatment after which his condition improved except for occasional symptoms. After that he was not heard of again.

This story was told by a bhikkhu who had witnessed the incident himself, and shows how bhikkhus under his training and guidance had to be strictly self-disciplined. For a minor offence they would be admonished and warned. For a serious one they would be harshly scolded. Those who were able to learn from them and who tried to rectify themselves were sure to progress steadily, whereas those who were severely reprobated and who could not control themselves would inflict serious harm on themselves. There was no intimacy of familiarity with him, since he was hardly on intimate terms with anyone. Those living with him had to understand this and be always heedful of his scrutinising eyes [spiritual as well as physical].

His Unique Adaptability

According to what has been gathered from the various Acharns who had been under his guidance, only those who were well advanced in Attainment would be allowed to enjoy the intimacy of the Venerable Acharn, in which case they would be accepted as equals, it not being necessary for a strict enforcement of discipline. But also worthy of note is that his deportment changed from place to place and from time to time. The change was sometimes so sudden that those staying with him often found it difficult to keep up with. Moreover, there were hardly any two changes that were alike. This was a peculiar and unique ability of his that no one was able to imitate. There were easy moments where tension and strictness were occasionally relaxed, and when he told them a variety of amusing stories. The following is one such story that concerned himself when he was still a layman.

An Anecdote of His Life While a Layman

When he was a youth, the Venerable Acharn had been a singer in his village. One time, during a public entertainment in the village, which was attended by thousands of people, in a burst of boldness, he suddenly offered to compete on stage with a girl in the art of singing³¹. 'The girl, however, was an old hand in this art, while the Venerable Acharn was but a green-horn. Before long it was evident that the Venerable Acharn was no match for her since right from the beginning he was the underdog. But he was saved in the nick of time by Chan [his eminence the Venerable Upali Gunupamacariya], who was at that time a boy a little older than the Venerable Acharn and who was also watching the competition. He saw that if the competition continued like this, his friend would certainly suffer a humiliating defeat.

The girl was like a full-grown tigress armed with fangs, claws and teeth, whereas his friend was like a cub with but a few milk teeth. How stupid he was in daring to compete with this ferocious tigress, for it was certain that he would soon be skinned alive.

With this thought in mind the youth Chan jumped onto the stage and yelled furiously, 'So here you are singing and enjoying yourself! Ai Mun³², you devil, I have hunted for you everywhere. Don't you know that your mother has had an accident? She fell from the upper floor of the house and I don't know if she is dead or alive. I only saw her collapse on the floor and then they sent me to look for you. I've been looking for you since this afternoon and you don't know how tired and hungry I am. I haven't eaten anything and I feel like I'm going to collapse.'

The youth Mun was shocked on hearing this. So was the tigress, and so in fact was everyone who heard what the youth Chan said. 'How is my mother?' Mun asked.

The youth Chan, feigning tiredness and hunger on the stage, said, 'Perhaps she is dead.'

³¹ In this kind of competition, the singers are to compose the words of a song extemporaneously. Neither side is allowed to prepare themselves in advance since the subject is selected on stage, after which they must immediately begin to sing, discuss or pretend to quarrel with each other, speaking out in verse but never in prose. The competitor who stammers or who cannot speak out as fluently as his opponent is considered the loser. The trick, therefore, is to find an ending word for which it is difficult to find a rhyme. Then the beginner speaks only one part of the song and lets his opponent continue the verse in which the final word must rhyme with the final word of the first half.

³² The word 'Ai' is a Vernacular term. In the central part of Thailand it is a rude word and used only between acquaintances, but in the rural parts of Thailand it is not considered rude and even implies some respect, something like 'big brother'

So am I now.' Then without more ado, Chan dragged Mun down from the stage and amidst the frightened sympathy of thousands of people, they hastened out of the area and ran at full speed towards Mun's village. On the way, Mun kept asking what it was his mother was doing when she fell from the house, but Chan only said that he didn't know for sure since he only saw her for a minute and was then told to go and find his friend by the people in the house. They would soon know whether she was dead or alive. Chan ran with his friend until he saw that they were far enough away so that Mun would be unable to go back to the competition.

The villages at that time were quite some distance from each other, separated by a forest, which was reputed to abound in wild beasts and ghosts. Few would dare go through it alone or in small groups. Chan suddenly changed completely and said, 'Your mother is all right, Mun. She didn't fall from the house. I couldn't bear seeing you hopelessly defeated by that tigress. She was going to skin you alive, you know. It would have been a humiliation to us and all our village. That's why I put on that act. Now everyone is sympathetic towards you because you had to leave. Now you're saved from a humiliating defeat by my trick. Won't you thank me for it?'

'Ai Chan, you devil!' exclaimed Mun. 'I wish you hadn't interfered. You know, it was my trick to lure that tigress into my trap. After that I would have skinned her myself, but now you've spoiled my game. How I wish I could go back now!'

'There, there! You don't know her well enough. If you had continued the way you were going, I'm sure you would have been put to shame in front of thousands of people. Stop bragging and thank me for having saved you.'

So it was that both youths missed all the entertainment that night. Strictly speaking, this story does not directly concern the religious part of the Venerable Acharn's life, but it is an anecdote about the lives of two youths who later became eminent persons in religious circles.

Another story concerns a Jataka tale [a story of the previous lives of the Buddha] called Vessanatara [which was very popular in Thailand in those days]. The tact and wit of his eminence the Venerable Upali was shown as follows.

The Venerable Acharn once asked the Venerable Upali what the name of the mother of a character in the Jataka story by the name of Mahdsee was, since there wasn't any mention of it in the scriptures. His eminence asked the Venerable Acharn why he was so ignorant because everyone in town knew her. Puzzled, the Venerable Acharn again asked in what text the name was mentioned. His eminence said that it wasn't mentioned in any scripture at all since she was a woman with a big voice by the name of Orb who was then living some distance from the monastery. The Venerable Acharn was quite amazed since he thought it impossible for a character mentioned in one of the previous lives of the Buddha to be alive and living at that time near the monastery in that town. Seeing this, his eminence said that he was referring to a woman by that name who was the mother of a girl named Mahdsee, both of whom were then living in a house not far away from the monastery and from the Venerable Acharn's own village.

This story gives us some idea of the cleverness and sense of humour of his eminence the Venerable Upali, who was the Venerable Acharn's closest friend in their youth and later his superior in bhikkhuhood.

Visit by the Angel Sakka-Mind is Dharma

While staying for the Rains Retreat in the village of Narm Mao in the district of Mae Ping in Chiangmai, the Venerable Acharn was most often visited by the angel Sakka and his angel followers. For these angels, the Venerable Acharn often gave sermons on loving-kindness on the level of appamannya brahmavihara [unlimited, all-embracing and impersonal], since they preferred to listen to this subject more than others.

The Venerable Acharn said that human beings are the direct owners of Buddhism and that they should thus respect the dharma in the same spirit as the angels and nagas do. Human beings may not be able to copy what these invisible beings have done, but the scriptures already give the various methods of paying respect. It is because man is heedless that such methods have been for the most part overlooked and man thus deprived of his own peace and happiness. Buddhism has in fact given all the advice or etiquette and morality necessary for the welfare and security of heedful people, those with a respectful attitude of mind towards the dharma.

Mind is chief in the world. If mind is crude and undeveloped, everything relating to it becomes correspondingly crude and undeveloped. This is like a body, which is dirty all over. Whatever sets of clothes come in contact with it are bound to become contaminated because of its dirtiness. The dharma, however pure it is by nature, becomes dirty when it comes in contact with a dirty mind. A clean cloth on a heap of dirt and filth and a person with a mind that is dirty who puts on a show of scriptures [like a wolf in sheep's clothing] can do nothing good.

A person whose mind is rude towards the dharma can never benefit by the dharma, which in fact can produce incalculable benefit. He can offer only lip-service and his practice of dharma is a farcical show. The dharma is nothing beyond a person's mind. The practice of dharma must be directed towards the development or purification of the mind. The path of dharma is the path of mind-development. To think that dharma is outside a person's body-and-mind is to misunderstand dharma in its real and ultimate sense. Because of this fact, a person's body-and-mind is the dharma itself. His doing good and evil produces an effect upon the dharma; so does his experience of happiness and suffering.

When a person understands the dharma in a wrong way, he misses the benefit which would otherwise have been gotten from it. Of course, he maybe able to acquire some benefit sometimes, but it is once again wrong benefit. Just think of the wrong results of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division; the wrong way of sewing or mending clothes, the wrong way of performing duties between two persons, such as husband and wife; the wrong way of earning money or spending it; the wrong way of driving a car, and so forth. Whatever is done wrong cannot serve the purpose it was intended to serve. On the contrary, it produces adverse results in the form of disappointment, self-delusion and trouble. What is more important, all these wrong, undesirable results are sure to inevitably affect the wrong-doer. It doesn't matter whether or not he knows of them or wants them.

It is most important for Buddhists to distinguish what is wrong from what is right. Dharma is the truth and if a person misunderstands the truth, it is he himself who deserves the blame and the results. The person who accepts the dharma becomes the dharma and can radiate peace both to himself and to all concerned. Without such acceptance, what results will be suspicion, animosity and then the consequent fires of violence which will

consume both its producer as well as all concerned. When the mind carries with it a self-consuming fire, where can it find peace? And when the world allows such a mind to be the judge and to take the helm of all the affairs of state, how can it mete out justice and bring about peace to people?

The Venerable Acharn said that from the time of his ordination he had been delightfully absorbed in contemplating the dharma of the Buddha and had realized how wide and deep the dharma is, far wider and deeper than the vast ocean at its widest and deepest point. 'Such is the subtlety and delicacy of the dharma, since it always grows wider, deeper and more subtle with the results gained from each step of practice. He could, if need be, prostrate himself to pay homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha incessantly at all times since that would have been more blissful than any other kind of work. There would have been no weariness nor fatigue in doing so, since the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are all timeless, being always with him. There was no more coming back to the realm of Change, Flux, and Ownerlessness.

The Case of the Unfinished Pagoda

For several nights during his meditation, the Venerable Acharn saw in his vision a small samanera and a girl walking back and forth round the area. Uncertain as to what their purpose could be, he later asked them what they were doing. They replied that they had been building a pagoda but had died before they were able to finish it. The small samanera was the younger brother of that girl. Both were passionately attached to their former plan and that's why they had been walking around that area for so long a time. They were in fact not so much tormented by other suffering as by their own attachment, which was preventing them from taking birth in a higher plane.

Knowing this, the Venerable Acharn gave them a sermon saying, 'It is useless to worry about the past, which is already gone and is incorrigible. It cannot be made present, however earnest our wish. To linger on it will only produce depression and disappointment. The same is true of the future. Both should be left as they are. It is the present which must be made use of in the right way, since it is within our means to do so. This truth should also be applied to the building of the pagoda,' he said. 'Should it have been made to conform to your wish, you would have been able to complete it. The fact that you died before its completion shows you its impossibility. Now you are being troubled by your own regret that you died before it could be completed. This is your second mistake. And that you are worrying' about it all the time, trying to complete it despite the fact that it can never be clone is your third mistake. This threefold mistake or wrong thinking does not end here. It produces wrong birth and unprofitable suffering as a result. All this originates from your wrong attitude of mind. It is advisable that you change this wrong attitude for your own sake and not hope for any more impossibilities.

'The purpose of building a pagoda is the merit to be obtained from it and never to carry around with you its bricks, stones or other building materials. What belongs to you in building the pagoda is merit [your wholesome thoughts and effort], but not the pagoda itself. Whatever merit is gained from it, be it much or little, is your rightful possession. Why should you be worrying about its bricks and stones? All merit makers carry with them merit, and never the bricks, stones or other things they have already given away.

'Just think of the building of a monastery, a road, or a water tank, the donation of money or various other things. Those things that were built or distributed freely are but the means

by which to make manifest the motives of the merit-makers. They are not of themselves the merit, the happiness in a celestial realm or nirvana. After a time they are sure to deteriorate, decay and disappear. But the merit obtained through their building or donation remains in the minds of those people. It is the mind [not the bricks, stones, or other material things] that experiences the merit, the Path, the Fruition, and Nirvana.

'There isn't anything more to be obtained from your unfinished pagoda. To worry about it is to be attached to it, although the thing you are attached to is a source of merit. That attachment is itself an unwholesome state of mind. As a result you have been nailed to it instead of taking birth in a suitable plane and experiencing the fruits of your merit. If you had concentrated on the merit obtained from the pagoda, and not on the pagoda itself, you would have been well-gone through your merit by now, for that is the nature of the merit itself. It is timeless and unchangeable. It is your own mistake in clinging to what should be let go of. Your regret and worry are unprofitable because they are impossible. The amount of your merit is enough for birth in a better plane if you are not delayed by your own attachment. It is time now that you change your state of mind and took birth in a suitable plane. Concentrate on the present, the real merit, for the sake of your advancement. It is a pity that you have made merit for your own progress and have been retarded by your own attachment to bricks and stones. These things have blocked your progress for so long. Let them go out of your mind and before long you will be freed. Whatever plane of existence you are entitled to, that you can expect by virtue of your merit.'

The Venerable Acharn then explained to them the Five Precepts along with the benefits of their observance. 'Firstly, all living beings have a value and meaning of their own; there should not be the doing of anything that will hurt or destroy their value and meaning, for evil is sure to befall one who does so. Secondly, everyone's possessions are priceless to himself although they may seem to be of no value to others. Any attempt to violate that ownership, in whatever way it is done, will certainly cause ill-will and a fight to protect those possessions. This a wise man should not do. Thirdly, a person's spouse or son or daughter is the apple of his eye. This feeling must be guarded with respect. To lure any of them from their owners is to have his or her eyes gouged out. Fourthly, to tell a lie is to betray another's confidence in the liar. No one, not even [the liar] or an animal, welcomes any falsehood. This is to be avoided. Fifthly, liquor is by nature an intoxicant which can drive a person out of his senses. It rids the drinker of his conscience and self-control. It should be avoided by those who do not want to be driven to insanity and the collapse of his health, both physical and mental.

The-benefits of the observance of the Five Precepts are as follows:

- 1) longevity and good health, 2) financial security, 3) a happy and harmonious family life,
- 4) being always reliable and trustworthy in the eyes of others, being looked up to with confidence, loved by gods and men, and harmless to oneself and others, 5) being equipped with wisdom, not being absent-minded.

'One who observes Precepts sows the seeds of happiness and harmlessness to men and animals. He is not suspected. He does not resort to violence, since he always considers others' feelings his as his own. One who observes Precepts and is truthful is sure to enter the realm of happiness in the hereafter since he is supported by morality and dharma. This you should bear in mind,' he said, 'and before long you will be blessed with what belongs to you through your merit.'

Evils of Attachment

At the end of the sermon, brother and sister were delighted in the dharma and asked him to give them the Five Precepts. He gave them the Five Precepts in compliance with their request and they took leave of him and suddenly disappeared. Due to their merit obtained from generosity and morality they took birth in the celestial realm called Tavatimsa and later occasionally came back to listen to his sermons and to express their gratitude to him for having given them helpful advice. It was because of his teaching, they said, that they were delivered from their own attachment, which had made them linger uselessly about the unfinished pagoda. They now knew how dangerous attachment is to the development of the mind, retarding a person's progress and preventing him from experiencing the happiness and peace which should have been his.

He then explained to them how such an attitude of mind is really a great obstacle to advancement. At the dissolution of the body a wise man should take care of his own mind instead of the body or any other thing. Otherwise, the mind will be overwhelmed by attachment or aversion to outside things. Irritation or anger [another aspect of attachment or desire] is but a self-consuming fire, and at the critical moment it can drag a person to any of the realms of woe, such as the hell realms, the realms of hungry ghosts, demons, and animals. These are realms of misery where suffering predominates. It is highly advisable that a person train his mind while he is in a position to do so, so that he will be able to understand the workings of his own mind while there is still time for self-rectification or self-improvement. At the critical moment when the body is going to dissolve, the mind, having been trained and prepared, will be able to detach itself, at least to some extent, from the manifestation of suffering. At the most, it will remain an absolutely detached observer, not being involved in all the good and evil of the world. This is the practice superior to all others, being supreme and unequalled.

Wise men, realizing that the state or condition of the mind is of the utmost importance in the Three Worlds, always take pains to train their minds and also urge others to do the same. It is the mind that enjoys or suffers results of karma, that experiences happiness or suffering, that produces gain or loss, that takes birth or undergoes death in the realms of bliss and those of misery. Thus it is of the utmost importance that a person treat, train, and guard his own mind in the right way, at present and in the future.

Brother and sister, now angels in the Tavatimsa heaven, were greatly impressed by his instruction, saying that they had never before heard such dharma. After that, they took leave of him, circumambulated him three times, drew back until they were outside the area where he was dwelling and then took to the air like wisps of cotton blown up by the wind.

Prophetic Vision of Three Elephants

Another remarkable story concerns a meditation-vision he had while staying on a mountain deep in the forest and very far from any village in Chiangmai. It was about three o'clock in the morning, the atmosphere being absolutely quiet and the body serenely calm. He had awakened from his sleep and was contemplating the dharma for a time when he felt that the mind was bent upon rest rather than contemplation. He then allowed the mind to withdraw into the deepest level of concentration and rest there for about two hours. After that the mind partially emerged and stayed at the

second level of concentration where a vision occurred.

In this vision a very large elephant approached him and which knelt down as if inviting him to climb up. He then climbed up on its back and at that moment there appeared two young bhikkhus, each mounting an elephant which followed along behind him. Their elephants were also very large, being only slightly smaller than his, but all three appeared equal in beauty and in grace, looking somewhat like kings' elephants. They were able to understand their masters' every wish.

When the two elephants came near, the one which the Venerable Acharn had mounted took the lead and headed towards a mountain about one kilometre from where they were. From the depth of his consciousness, it seemed as if he were leading the two young bhikkhus out of the Three Worlds of Sammati [suppositions, relativity], never to come back again. On reaching the mountain his elephant led them to a cave on top of a small hill, which was part of that big mountain. When it reached the cave, it entered it and turned to face the mouth of the cave whereas the two elephants that followed approached and faced him, keeping their backs to the mouth of the cave.

The Venerable Acharn then spoke to them as if to bid them farewell, saying, 'This is the last moment when my becoming and birth will be absolutely severed from the mundane world. It is going to end here and will never come back to the world of births and deaths. I would like you to go back to fulfil your self-development, for soon you are to follow me and go in the same manner as I am going now. That a sentient being will be able to depart from this world of suffering which is full of retarding influences is by no means as easy as going to a fair for the sake of entertainment. It is so much against the stream of passion that it requires wholehearted devotion backed by wholesale detachment from the body. These are the requisites for crossing over the realm of birth and death, and, for that matter, for crossing over cemeteries³³.

'My departure this time is not one heading for collapse but is for deliverance from the aggregates, detachment from all lingering desires and departure, from all worries. It is like a prisoner leaving a prison without any regret in going away from the prison of the aggregates which sentient beings are most unwilling to leave. There should therefore be no sorrow, or grief at my going since that would be the increase of unprofitable suffering.'

At the end of the instructions, he told the two young bhikkhus to draw their elephants back away from him. The elephants had all this time been standing still as if overwhelmed with sorrow. They looked like real elephants in the human world and not part of a meditation vision. They both drew back to the mouth of the cave, turned their backs to the Venerable Acharn, but then turned back once again to face him with a look of solemnity. At that moment his elephant drew back further into the cave until half of its body was within the solid wall. Then his mind emerged completely from its concentrated state.

According to the Venerable Acharn's interpretation, this unique vision was both prophetic and symbolic. He predicted that at his passing away there would be two young bhikkhus blessed with the same attainment as he himself, but he did not mention their names. With regard to its symbolic aspect, meditation and insight are helpful to an arahant until the last moment of his life, both being instruments for subduing suffering while the aggregates of body and mind are still intertwined and have to function

³³ As is said elsewhere by the Venerable Author, 'Fear death and you will die again.'

together. This functioning together will continue until the aggregates and deliverance are severed from each other in the process called death, after which both meditation and insight will cease to function *and* to exist with the extinction of the mundane.

The Venerable Acham said that he was not frightened when the elephant backed into the solid rock wall of the cave while he was still on its back, and he allowed the elephant to perform its duty as it saw fit. What was to be appreciated was that about the time of his passing away, not long before or after that, there would be two young bhikkhus who would win through to the same attainment as he had.

What was peculiar about the vision was his instructing the two young bhikkhus, telling them to go back to fulfil their self-development first. It looked as if he were actually going away at that moment. Unfortunately - to the writer, that is - he would not reveal the names of the two bhikkhus, even when asked. From the time of hearing about this vision until the Venerable Acharn's passing away, the writer was so desirous of knowing the names of the two bhikkhus that he tried to observe all his disciples to guess who they might be, thereby neglecting his own faults and forgetting the fact that such a person of high attainment would, unlike other worldlings, never be given to self-advertising, and would certainly be blessed with discernment and self-denial to the highest degree. Otherwise, they would never have been blessed with such an attainment. To fall victim to self -advertising would be inviting contemptuous pity on the part of the wise and at the same time hostile criticism from the fool, along with frantic excitement from the credulous.

Giving Help to Hungry Ghosts and Beings from Hell

The assistance that the Venerable Acharn gave to the invisible beings of various planes and kinds was an indispensable part of his life, especially when he was dwelling in the wilds. The more remote and secluded the place, the more often their visits and the greater the number of his invisible guests who approached him either for the sake of sermons and questions or for rescue from danger and suffering. This latter group included the hungry ghosts who were waiting to receive the fruits of merit that would be shared with them by their relatives³⁴. These hungry ghosts and beings in realms of misery had been waiting a long time to enjoy the fruits of merit done by their relatives and then dedicated to them, so that they would be at least partly relieved of their intense suffering, for how long they had been suffering in terms of an earthly calendar there can be no measurement. Neither can there be any measurement of how long they would have to suffer in the future.

These beings in suffering and distress who were able to come and relate their plight often approached the Venerable Acharn to help tell their relatives about their sufferings so that those relatives might think of them while making merit and dedicate the fruits to them. But when the Venerable Acharn asked about the names of their relatives, the names they gave him were completely unknown to him or to anyone in that period. They

³⁴ To enjoy the fruits of merit made by others means to be informed of and then to appreciate the making of that meritorious deed. This is possible through two factors as mentioned above, i.e., to be informed of that action by the meritmakers and then having been so informed, to sincerely appreciate it. This enjoying the fruits of merit is not confined to or between relatives, but the fact is that in most cases the merit-makers are inclined to think of their relatives or persons close to them first. The names of the deceased can therefore be mentioned and the fruits of merit be dedicated directly or personally. This kind of dedication reaches the person(s) involved more effectively.

had been suffering for hundreds or thousands of years in those realms [the calculation of time according to those realms], the length of which could not be calculated according to earthly time. And even after they were partly relieved of their sufferings and were in a realm of less intense suffering, they were still in a position which was not that much better, for they had been so long in such realms that no relatives or descendants could be traced in that area. Cases such as these were most often found, and they were like ownerless animals waiting for someone to come to their rescue.

There were also those who had not been dead for a long time and who could be helped. The names of their relatives or descendants were known and the places where they were living could be found. In cases such as these, the Venerable Acharn would contact their relatives and tell them to dedicate the fruits of their merit each time to their deceased relatives. There were some cases, however, who were in a position to enjoy the fruits of merit dedicated impersonally by others who were not their relatives [in which cases their names would not be known]. The Venerable Acharn himself made it a rule to dedicate the fruits of merit to all beings. This dedication reached all beings who were in distress, except those who were only able to enjoy the fruits of their relatives dedicated merit.

The Venerable Acharn said there were so many of these hungry ghosts and beings in distress that they could not be counted as to their kinds and numbers. They swarmed round him and begged for his help more than any other kind of invisible beings. In other words, they were, as a Thai saying goes, 'breathing through others' nostrils' [being like beggars]. This is the result of not having done any good whatsoever while in the world of human beings. This is a lesson showing the importance of merit-making, whether in the form of generosity in giving or in any other form. We are all pilgrims wandering through the various realms of existence in the cycle of rebirths and re-deaths. It is thus advisable that we should prepare for ourselves in the future some form of provision for use in time of emergency, being as we are heirs to our own karma and responsible for its results. Whether we shall be born in a lower or higher realm, to experience whatever degree of suffering or happiness, is due to one's own karma. To hope for or depend upon another's help is like breathing through another's nostrils.

The Venerable Acharn was profoundly experienced in the way of association with invisible beings of various kinds. He was able to help them in a variety of ways [giving sermons or instructions, answering questions, dedicating fruits of merit, tracing relatives or descendants of hungry ghosts, etc.], only he did not reveal to his disciples all that he knew. We could not help shuddering with horror while listening to his accounts of the hungry ghosts and the beings in the realms of woe. It was, however, the horror of the results of evil karma rather than of the ghosts themselves. If ever people should be able to see plainly the results of evil and good karma as they see other material things, they would most certainly be horrified at evil karma and stay away from it, the same as they dare not touch fire. They would also be eager to do good which has the power of cooling and which results in happiness.

There would not then be so much trouble and misery as there is in the world today.

To Make Known the Truth of Heaven and Hell

While the Venerable Acharn was explaining dharma and facts concerning invisible beings and their various realms of existence, a Venerable Acharn who was his disciple

offered his suggestion as follows: 'Since it is plain that people do not realize the results of good and evil karma because they are not able to see the realms of these invisible beings in the same manner as [the Venerable Acharn] is able to do, what if the Venerable Acharn were to explain this to all the people so that they would believe in the results of karma, since this had also been done by the Buddha and his Noble Disciples? In this way, the people would appreciate the Venerable Acharn's efforts in the same manner as his other disciples.'

The Venerable Acharn said, 'If I made such a revelation indiscriminately, I would be accused of being mad. The same would be true of the one who made this suggestion, and then of other bhikkhus who are my disciples. The doctrine of Buddhism belongs to wise men who have discernment. It is proclaimed to be practiced by people with discernment. To offer such [mysterious and nonprovable] truths to all people indiscriminately would result in more harm than good. Even with regard to the more obvious truths, people still very often do not know what to do and what not to do in various circumstances, traditions and senses of value in a particular place and time. Although dharma is the truth beyond the world, yet when it is applied to the world, it must be done carefully with special regard for the world's traditions, inclinations and other factors.'

'The Buddha was the All-Enlightened One who realized those truths before all else, yet he was always not without tact and discernment. Time, circumstance and the maturity of the listeners were always taken into account. It must be remembered that wisdom without the control of mindfulness cannot produce any desired result, but instead may yield results that are unprofitable and undesirable. We may of course, be indifferent to what others say but the harmful effects due to lack of mindfulness will inevitably bounce back to oneself, and this cannot be overlooked. The truths concerning these things, however miraculous, should not be treated lightly in order to make people excited. We should not praise or be proud of such an approach to Buddhism. The right way should be the one based on wisdom, which was recommended by the Buddha. It is through this approach that the Dharma of the Buddha can be preserved for posterity. Now, if you have an amount of money great enough to do good or evil with, what would you do for the security of that money and of yourself?

'I would try to safeguard it to the best of my ability,' that bhikkhu said.

'How would you apply your wisdom for the security of yourself and your money?' asked the Venerable Acharn.

'I would put aside a part of that money to help other people, and then keep the rest in a proper place, not letting anyone see or know where it is kept.'

'Now we come back to the truths regarding invisible beings. If you have known all such truths, how would you teach them to people so that they would be helpful both to yourself and others, and all this without any adverse results?'

'I would have to treat them carefully in the same way as I would my money,' answered that bhikkhu.

'So you see my point. Just a moment ago you asked me to reveal all truths regarding the invisible beings indiscriminately to the people, without taking into consideration any adverse results which may come about. You see how careless you are. Do you know whether or not there are more wise people than foolish, or vice versa? And what kind of

people can preserve and maintain the Doctrine for posterity?'

'It's my own fault,' that bhikkhu said. 'I wanted other people to know about these wonderful truths which I have never heard from anyone else before. I supposed that other people would likewise be impressed. I let my self get carried away. I didn't stop to think about what undesirable results there might be in doing so, whether or not the wise outnumbered the foolish, or vice versa. Now I know that it is the fools who outnumber the wise. In a village, for instance, there are so few people who understand the truths about morality or dharma. The rest do not care about what is good and evil, why they are here and where they will go. They are interested only in merrymaking and just wasting their lives away. Those who are able to preserve and maintain the dharma for posterity must be those who are blessed with wisdom and discernment. This is true of both the affairs of the country and those of the dharma. The rest of the people, however, will reap the harvest sown by the few.'

'You must know that the affairs of religion or dharma are far more subtle than those of the country. They require a kind of wisdom that is more profound, a wisdom that must never be applied for destructive purposes, but one which will be conducive only to development and progress. In terms of the Noble Eightfold Path, this is called Right View and Right Intention, by means of which a person's words and deeds will be moulded and developed.

'Right Meditation must always be supported by Right View, otherwise it would become what is called 'tree-stump' meditation [knowing nothing]. Wisdom must be made the base of meditation. What knowledge has occurred to the mind, or what the mind has reached out to know, or how such events or circumstances should be treated or valued - all these must be analysed, criticised and judged by wisdom in order to prevent self-delusion.

'There is an unlimited amount of knowledge, both internal and external, which will be realized through the development of meditation. This is especially true in the cases of those with tendencies to witness and observe various events. It is impossible to prevent such a mind from exercising its own potentiality. It is here that wisdom must be called in to digest and select, disposing of some things and retaining others. Even meditation cannot be made use of in any efficient way without wisdom, for the meditator would still be disturbed by spasmodic joys and sorrows. Such influences, unless dealt with ruthlessly by wisdom, will stubbornly persist in disturbing the mind, ridding it of its well-earned peace and progress. Hence the imperative necessity of wisdom in every stage of mind-development.

'Those who are ordained have "gone forth" to seek the wisdom and virtues that the world desires [but which it cannot seek itself]. They cannot be ignorant of the tricks of their own defilements. They must be able to detect those tricks through the development of their wisdom. It is natural that those without protection [against the enemy's attack] cannot be sure of their security. For those who have been ordained, their protection is Dharma and Vinaya, mindfulness-and-wisdom being their main weapons of defence. Mindfulness-and-wisdom in all movements will provide them with security at all moments. Thus all thoughts, words, and deeds must always be based on mindfulness-and-wisdom which alone can ensure that security.

'It would be very much like my disciples to strive earnestly towards the Cessation of Suffering -- always with mindfulness-and-wisdom taking the lead. This means they must be

active and enthusiastic in doing what is expected of them so that they will be worthy of the Dharma and the Vinaya. But they must not be absorbed in or bogged down by self-indulgence. It must also be understood that the task of a bhikkhu is superior to all other tasks, being as it is one of breaking away from the cycle of rebirths and redeaths.

'There is in the world no task more exacting than one of delivering the mind from the threefold [vicious] circle [of defilements, karma and effects causing defilements once again]. This necessitates devotion in all respects, including one's life, which has been committed to exertion, which, unlike in other tasks, must be unconditional. Only through this degree of exertion and devotion can the wonderful dharma, unknown and undreamed of, be realized. Methods other than this are dubious as to their results. For those who aspire to unload completely the burden of suffering, exertion must be able to accept the challenge of death. In my case, before I came to be called an Acharya teaching others like this, I never thought I would survive the ordeals I had to face. My aim of Deliverance always defeated threats of death. Every aspect of exertion was directed at the target beyond life, or, more accurately, beyond death, with mind as the supreme commander issuing the absolute order never to retreat but to let the body dissolve before its very eyes. Countless times has the body been dissolved. There is little meaning in the process being repeated again. So this time let it be applied more profitably in exchange for realization of the dharma of the Buddha. No other realization is now required.

'What I want to know is only the knowledge by which I can be freed from the cycle of rebirths and redeaths. Exertion based on this resolution is like the machines of a plant which operate continuously. It functions with the infallible mindfulness-and-wisdom, like a wheel of dharma revolving ceaselessly day and night in its relentless fight against defilements. There is absolutely no relaxation of exertion during waking hours. After a period of sleep the fight is resumed with the combined powers of faith, mindfulness [which includes meditation], wisdom and exertion, all joining forces in the pitched battle against defilements, which also muster up their forces, making use of all their guile and trickery. The last stage of this war ends with the defilements, which have long reigned over the mind, being decisively defeated. They are unearthed and eradicated completely once and for all from the mind, there being no more chance for them to rear their heads and stir up any trouble. The body, however, still remains with its life purged of all contaminations.

Swimming on Land and Bleeding One's Chest

'The reward of this unrelenting warfare for so long a time is none other than the mind itself, which may be compared to a beautiful maiden. Once it is won over by the dharma, it becomes "immortal mind" or "immortal dharma". Whoever can discover it becomes supreme and immortal. But the dharma is on the other side of death. Whoever is afraid of death, taking delight in birth, can never realize the dharma. Such a one is over-confident in life, and he does not attempt to do good while he is in a position to do so. This over-confidence will cost him innumerable deaths with immeasurable tears of sorrow and grief. It is then unpredictable as to how long he will have to remain imprisoned like that [as long as he cannot face and understand death by means of dharma].

Practicing Buddhists should know this so that they may decide for themselves whether to look death in the face with the dharma as their refuge, or to shy away from death and

once again suffer birth along with all its accompanying miseries. This warning is for them to ponder upon, for there is no point in being submerged in suffering and wasting away every breath they take. Such an attitude of mind only causes delay and regret. Every moment of our lives we have been pushed around by defilements which have caused us to swim on land and to bleed our chests in doing so³⁵. In other words, we have been forced to shoulder the oppressive burden of suffering for a long time within our own minds. The way to unload this unjust burden is likewise within our own minds, which must be reformed and renovated through the combined forces of faith, exertion, mindfulness and wisdom. There must not be overconfidence in life, in youth and in health, especially as far as bhikkhus or practicing Buddhists are concerned.

'In the final analysis, what can lead a person astray or what can guide him on the right path is nothing but his own mind. In this context, therefore, a person's hope should not be based on any outside source. Rather, he should look inside and observe impartially what kind of work is being produced by the machine of his own thoughts, words and deeds. Are they strengthening the force of suffering and promoting, its results with delight, or are they producing the anti-toxin of dharma for the sake of disillusionment and detachment from the cycle of rebirths and redeaths? This introspective observation must be constantly made to assure the steady progress and development of all practicing Buddhists.'

This was the Venerable Acharn's answer to a request on the part of his disciples who wished to have him declare the truths about the invisible realms and beings to all people. Perhaps the writer is of a rather crude nature, but he preferred this type of a sermon, it being much more agreeable to the mind which still needed a strong force to stimulate it and to rouse it to action. If the Venerable Acharn initiated a sermon himself, it tended to be smooth, but not very exciting or spectacular, even though the dharma being taught was profound or advanced. But if some disciple had done something wrong or offered a wrong idea, the style of his instruction changed dramatically. It became bold, stirring, challenging. Such an instruction greatly encouraged his disciples to try harder. Some of his disciples were aware of this and occasionally made use of questioning him to invigorate themselves.

Holy Cave on Top of a Mountain

At one time during his secluded wanderings he spent some time dwelling in the cave of Chiengdao with three or four disciples who had accompanied him. On the third night he told them that he had seen in his meditation vision a large, wide cave near the top of that mountain, which was very steep and very high. The cave had been the dwelling place of some Pacceka Buddhas [those who are enlightened but who do not preach the dharma to the world] in the past, but at that time it was almost inaccessible since too much effort was required to reach it and then there was no village nearby for alms-food. He told his disciples to go up and admire it themselves, but said that they should take enough provisions for the following days.

³⁵ This refers figuratively to those who desire an impossibility such as being afraid to face reality, to resist the irresistible and so forth. All such attitudes of mind and consequent attempts are a twofold evil, the former (wrong attitude of mind) being like swimming on land, whereas the latter (consequent efforts) being like bleeding one's own chest. Both produce more, instead of less, suffering.

There was no trail or beaten track leading to that cave. They had to clamber up rocks and precipices, with the summit of that mountain as their only goal since the cave was just beneath its peak. The bhikkhus and their lay disciples [to carry the provisions needed] followed his order, and making great efforts, they were able to reach the cave which they found to be very wide and impressively beautiful, with an atmosphere both inviting and comfortable. The bhikkhus wanted to stay there for the sake of meditation-development, but they found that they could not because the cave was so high up the mountain and the way to it very steep and dangerous. Moreover, the nearest village was too far away to go to for alms-food. After some time their provisions were nearly exhausted and they were forced to come down.

The Venerable Acharn asked them whether the cave was beautiful or not. He had seen it in his vision and wanted them to enjoy its beauty themselves. He went on to say that there were many wonderful things in that mountain. The cave at the top had been constantly guarded by terrestrial angels. Anyone who went up there and who did not pay due respect would certainly be punished. He said that he had forgotten to tell them to be strictly self-controlled while up there since any indecent behaviour would incur the wrath of the cave's invisible guards. What he told them about was as if he had seen it with his own eyes, and revealed how clear and accurate his clairvoyance or 'divine eye' was.

His warning his bhikkhus to be self-controlled was not confined only to that cave. It applied also to other places in the wilds. It is natural that the angels in those places preferred cleanliness and orderliness, including the decorums of cultured people. When the terrestrial angels saw the requisites of a bhikkhu placed in a disorderly manner, or when the bhikkhu himself slept in an indecent posture, lying, for instance, spread-eagled or mumbling in his sleep, they often complained about this to the Venerable Acharn, saying that a bhikkhu holds a status superior to other worldly people, and he should therefore be better self-controlled both while awake and asleep, so that he may be a model gods and men can look up to. There is no profit or dignity when a bhikkhu condescends to behave like a layman. This was not malicious fault-finding, the angels said, but was done out of goodwill and the desire to have bhikkhus live up to their recognized status and dignity.

It was in view of this fact that when he was dwelling in the seclusion of the wilds that he always told his bhikkhu disciples to be orderly and clean with regard to their requisites. The latrines must also be built in a proper place, not near or in the direction of the place where the terrestrial angels were residing, since they might be dissatisfied and do the bhikkhus harm. Whenever there was any disciple who was, like himself, able to communicate with them, there was then no need for the Venerable Acharn to warn him since he would be able to know for himself how to conduct himself so as not to displease these invisible beings. Quite a number of his disciples were able to know about these things but they were so-called forest bhikkhus who would not reveal their ability to others since they would certainly be ridiculed by 'modem' scholars. Only in informal conversations between their close friends and disciples could one know about their abilities and attainment.

The Fault-Finding Naga

In Mount Chiengdao there is another cave. This is not the long one visited by tourists [nor the one on top]. It is higher up than the tourist cave and it is here that the Venerable

Acharn dwelt for a time. In that cave a great naga had also dwelt for a long time. He was given to fault-finding and was rather hard-hearted, being almost unable to enjoy the fruits of merit dedicated by the Venerable Acharn. Perhaps he had had ill-will against a bhikkhu for some time and that was why he always cherished a malicious fault-finding attitude towards the Venerable Acharn every moment of the day and night, even while he was sleeping.

At night when the Venerable Acharn was doing his walking-meditation with his sandals on, the naga would say, 'Why is this recluse walking like a racehorse? He should be better self-controlled. Doesn't he know that his sandals are making a noise like thunder and that I am being much disturbed?' This despite the fact that the Venerable Acharn was walking with the best possible self-control, making the least possible noise with his sandals.

Having heard what the naga said he managed to walk with more self control and less noise, but still the naga complained, saying, 'What is he doing now? Is he a hunter shooting birds?

When, once in a while, the Venerable Acharn happened to trip over a stone, the naga at once murmured a complaint, 'What is this recluse? He walks like a strip-tease dancer!' At times when the Venerable Acharn arranged some small stones along the track for his walking meditation, the naga would grumble, saying, 'Why should this recluse be always moving this and that? Doesn't he know that my head will break because of all his noise?' Even during sleep when his hands and feet would move a little he would know when he woke up that the naga had found fault with him as usual, complaining about his heavy breathing, snoring and other things.

Whenever the Venerable Acharn would attune his mind to that of the naga, he would see the naga staring at him as if he never slept or didn't have anything else to do. It was a pity that this naga was obsessed by thoughts that consumed himself instead of thoughts of other kinds. The Venerable Acharn took great pity on him, knowing that such a wrong attitude of mind would produce an evil that would bounce back to hurt the mind that gave it birth. So he gave the naga a long instruction saying, 'I have come here for the sake of self-development and assisting others, never to hurt anyone. It is inadvisable that you should think that I have come here solely to cause you trouble. Whatever results of the good that I have done, I have also dedicated to all sentient beings, yourself included. You are sure to reap no benefit from your attempts to find fault with me. As a living being I cannot help moving about, walking this way and that and changing the postures of the body. As for self-control, I have tried my best, but after all, I am still alive and cannot lie dead and motionless or without breathing. While sleeping, the systems of the body still function, and, for that matter, I cannot help making noise which is to be expected while walking or doing other things.

'It seems, you always exaggerate whatever I do, saying, for instance, that I walk like a racehorse. You must know that a horse is an animal and should not be compared to a recluse who always practices selfcontrol. That you should not do if you do not want to nullify your own good and then head for the realms of misery. If you have in mind your own progress and development, from now on you should observe the condition of your own mind and try to understand whether it is good or evil, right or wrong, so that you will not be consumed by your own fire of evil. Such malicious fault-finding, even if another really has such faults, is by its very nature an evil on the part of the fault-finder, causing his own mind to deteriorate and become defiled.

'All my movements are ordinary, even coupled with the best of self control, yet I am severely blamed. What if you were a human being in a human world? I suppose in your case it would be the pot calling the kettle black. You should know that I am not troubled by your complaints, which in this case have bounced back to you with a vengeance. The result is now plain to you, only you refuse to open your eyes and see. I have known your every thought and forgiven them, but it is apparent that you have not stopped producing them, only to the detriment and hurt of yourself. Why are you not tired of accumulating evil? Were you a patient, your illness would be almost incurable by now. I have been helping other sentient beings such as angels, demons and other nagas, many of them more powerful than you are. They have all accepted the dharma and have realized its value, all, that is, except yourself, who has unreasonably taken delight in malicious fault-finding, thereby neglecting to look at the truth of the dharma. It is a pity you are obsessed by the thought that such an attitude of mind is helpful or profitable. What is more pitiful for you is that you will be destined for a miserable realm of existence at the dissolution of the body of yours.

'I must now speak frankly to you, without any evil intention whatsoever, and hope that you will not misinterpret it. Ever since I came to stay here I have always respected your presence and feelings, trying in every possible way to be self-controlled in every movement so as not to cause you any inconvenience. I already knew that you were given to fault-finding and this is what you have been doing to me. You must also now know that I have not been troubled by your fault-finding since I have never enjoyed finding other's faults. It is you who have been so much troubled by your own action.

'In this case I can therefore say that there is no evil whatsoever on my part. Whatever evil there is belongs to you and falls to you alone. Wise men, being detached from the mundane, enjoy the fruits of the wholesome deeds they have accumulated both for themselves and others. Why are you so inclined towards such perverse thoughts and deeds? I do not suffer the results of this evil for you, but seeing that you are going to suffer, I would like to keep you from it. I know how evil is sure to make its doer suffer and this is what I am afraid of. Old age, illness and death may appear to be frightening to others but they mean little to me, compared with the effects of evil.

'To be ordained a bhikkhu in Buddhism is to conduct oneself against the stream of defilements, training oneself to do everything in accordance with the dharma. There must be trouble and suffering in going against that stream and in complying with the dharma. This I know and willingly accept for the sake of Deliverance from defilements. It is in view of this that I have come here and have been undergoing various inconveniences in this cave. Never have I had any intention to give you any trouble, nor do I cherish any ill-will towards any other beings in the Three Worlds, knowing that they are all heirs to the effects of their own karma. I always dedicate the results of my doing wholesome deeds to all of them, including you. You should bear this in mind and then consider what good there is in finding fault with others with malicious intent. It is nothing but inflicting untold suffering upon yourself. I would like to advise you to realize this and stop the evil thoughts and words which serve only to carry you to a realm of misery.

'The dharma belongs to all sentient beings in all the planes of consciousness. This is the truth that should be accepted although one is not in a position to follow and realize it fully. This truth is all-embracing as far as the Three Worlds are concerned and is an enemy to no one. Those understanding this truth have always tried to follow it in whatever ways are possible to them. You are one of those who are able to understand the dharma to a

certain extent, but why are you doing everything to the contrary and imposing on yourself what is conducive to untold suffering? You know what suffering is and you don't want it, but why do you take so much delight in accumulating the causes of suffering, this malicious fault-finding? Haven't you realized yet that it will only bring you the suffering which you do not at all want?

'I know that you have long been cherishing these evil thoughts without your knowing that I am able to know them. My feelings towards you are feelings of pity, not irritation or anger. I am telling you this so that it will be of some help to you. Remember that whatever evil results there are belong to you and fall to you alone, since you are the one who has given birth to them and cherished them. I am not in the least troubled since I am not in the least affected. What is in my mind, besides great pity for your wrong attitude of mind, is an unshakeable degree of peace and bliss.'

All this time the great naga did not say a word in protest. 'The words of this recluse are interesting,' he thought, 'but I'm afraid I cannot fully follow what he said. I have been in the habit of thinking like this for such a long time. It may not be until after arising in another plane that I shall be able to comply with his instructions. This recluse is unique and wonderful. How can he know I am here, since I am invisible to him? And how can he see even my own thoughts? Many many bhikkhus have come here and not one of them had ever known of my presence. All of them had been driven away by my tricks, including my spitting venom. Even while he was asleep my thoughts were no secret to him! It seems he is able to know everything.'

'Just what about my thoughts and attitude of mind? They seem to be so incurable. Perhaps I am just loaded down with evil. His instruction is obviously well-intended, but what is my mind that it cannot cure itself? I wonder what will befall me in the next plane of consciousness?'

After some moments, the Venerable Acham asked, 'Have you been able to realize the truth of what I have said?'

'I have understood every word but I know that it will be difficult for me to rectify myself, since my mind has been so long accustomed to these evil tendencies,' the naga said.

'What evil tendencies do you mean?'

'My fault-finding,' the naga replied. 'I know that it's evil, but I can't seem to help it.'

'It is good enough if you are convinced of its evil and try to rectify yourself,' the Venerable Acharn said. 'Habit or impulse will gradually be reduced in strength. I can only point the way. I am unable to help anyone correct his own faults, for that is the duty of everyone who believes in the dharma and who prefers to follow it. With persistent practice and self-training, any evil tendency is sure to be weakened and then removed from the mind. If you sincerely believe in the dharma of the Buddha, then you will be protected by it. The mind protected by dharma is always endowed with blissful peace, both while awake and asleep. It can remain balanced in the midst of all disturbing influences. This is the benefit to be obtained from the dharma.'

The naga admitted the truth of his instruction and said he would try to follow it obediently. He was found to improve a little with the development of his self-control, but it still gave him a lot of trouble and the Venerable Acharn, seeing that his presence

would not do the naga much good, told him that he would have to go to another place. The naga willingly consented and thus ends the story of the Venerable Acharn and the fault-finding naga.

Influence of Habit and Repetition

Habits, be they good or bad, do not develop without causes. They are produced by repetition until they become second nature to a man. An evil habit is difficult to overcome since it has a strong drag on the mind, whereas a good habit always gives the mind the power of uplift. It is therefore important that parents implant in the minds of their children desirable habits, before it is too late. This may be done by finding them nurses with good habits, for instance.

Children receive constant instruction in the laws of nature at home. This kind of education yields a more profound influence on their characters than the education they receive in any school. Children spend more time out of school than in it, and the classrooms of life, where they can learn the laws of nature, are everywhere outside the schools. What children see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think every moment of the day and night are the blackboards on which have been written the lessons of life. They learn a variety of things from all places and all people they encounter, be they places of entertainment or men and women, old and young. All are teachers teaching both good and evil, which the children's receptive minds readily absorb, and who are always ready to imitate those they have learned from. How much good and evil they encounter in growing up will certainly determine their characters as adults.

The influence of environment can cause repetition, which in turn causes habits which later take possession of the child's whole being, and it then manifests itself through thoughts, words and deeds. It is because of habits that both good and evil people find it difficult to change ingrained prejudices or tendencies. Anything that goes against one's tendencies or character cannot be continued for long and are easily abandoned when the occasion for doing so arises. But when the results, whether good or evil, are evident and appeal to one's character, the mind is then absorbed in them and such a second nature is most difficult to overcome. This shows the importance of a person's habits, especially wholesome ones, which must be supported by persistent training and patience and discipline, coupled with the exercise of discriminating wisdom. These are to be applied to spending money, eating, sleeping, going to places of entertainment, following the decorums of cultured people and so forth. There are, of course, teething troubles to be encountered in such growth and change, but these will gradually fade away with persistent practice and discipline. Hence the changeability of a habit despite discouraging difficulties at the outset. This truth applies to grownups as well as children.

Nothing good can come of itself without the effort of training and patience. This is especially true of good habits or good men. In this respect the world is nothing but a large training institution in which all beings must be trained throughout their lives, from the cradle to the grave. Whatever goal has not yet been reached must be approached through the system of repetition called practice, which requires effort and discipline. No goal or desirable results can be achieved without endurance and devotion during the course of self-training.

Manners of Passing Away of the Arahant Disciples

The Venerable Acharn had many impressive visions while staying in the cave of Chiengdao. Almost every night during the wee hours angels from the various planes of consciousness approached him for sermons. Sometimes there was only one group but at other times there were two or three groups coming within the same night, and he gave each group a sermon which was agreeable to their tendencies and maturity. There were also some arahant disciples who visited him, exchanging complimentary greetings. Occasionally they showed him the manner of their passing away. These included those who passed away within that cave and others who had passed away elsewhere. They always gave him explanations with their demonstrations. The salient points of their visits will be related below and the writer begs the forgiveness of the readers for any deficiencies, which there certainly must be.

An arahant, whatever category he or she happens to be³⁶, is a wonderful and supreme person, both to himself and to the three realms of existence. It is very difficult for one of them to appear in the world. An arahant is next only to the Buddha in superiority. The life of an arahant is far different from that of an ordinary person. It is a life invigorated by dharma, despite the body which looks like any other body in the mundane world. The mind, being absolutely purified, refreshes every part of the body.

'You are one of the arahants who have eradicated the seeds of birth from the mind and have thereby become a person without the seeds of becoming and birth, another object of worship for the worlds,' said the arahant disciple who visited him in his vision. 'That is why we have come to offer our appreciation for your achievement, the likes of which is so rare in the Three Worlds. This is the Goal which most people want to reach but few of them want to tread the Path. People crave for external security in the form of parents and relatives [including health of the body, financial security, etc.] little thinking of the inward security of their own purified minds. There are uncountable sentient beings who lack the source of this real security because they overlook its importance. The birth of an arahant is therefore of great benefit to the Three Worlds. You have given extensive assistance to both human and invisible beings since you are well versed in the language of the mind, which is supreme to all the languages in the Three Worlds. Every Buddha and arahants of some categories have made use of this universal language in helping others, especially invisible beings. This language is therefore of great help in facilitating the communication between minds.'

After their instruction, most of the arahants who came to visit him demonstrated the manner of their complete passing away [parinibbana]. Some passed away while sitting cross-legged, others while lying on their right sides, and still others while walking or standing. In most cases, however, they were seen to have passed away while lying on their right sides or while sitting cross-legged, only a few of them having passed away while standing or walking. Those who entered parinibbana while sitting collapsed quietly at the last moment, with the cessation of all the functions of the body, but it was difficult to observe those who entered parinibbana while lying down since their breathing became more and more subtle with each passing moment, and they looked more like, they were sleeping than passing away. Another was seen standing still with his right hand over his left on his chest with his eyes closed. After a moment he slowly dropped down to a sitting posture and then smoothly to a lying posture. Still another walked back and forth about six or seven times, then slowly dropped down to a lying posture.

³⁶ See supplementary notes.

It was noticeable that the bodies of those who passed into parinibbana while sitting, standing or walking seemed weightless as they smoothly dropped to a lying posture, appearing to be more feather-like than solid body. All these arahants demonstrated their passing into parinibbana about a metre in front of him. They all passed away in a serene and highly impressive manner, showing no suffering or restlessness, such as can generally be seen in the cases of ordinary people. These accounts of these supreme persons bidding farewell to the mundane world are wonderful indeed.

Three arahants had passed away within the cave of Mount Chiengdao itself, two of them while lying and the third while walking. They also demonstrated their parinibbana to him. Before showing him, each of them explained the reasons for passing away in that particular manner. The Venerable Acharn said there were many arahants who had passed away in Thailand. As far as can be recalled, there were three in the cave of Chiengdao in the province of Chiangmai, two in the town of Lopburi, one in a cave called Tago and another behind Mount Vong Phra Chan [Lunar Disc], one in the region of Khao Yai [Big Mountain] in the town of Nakhon Nayok [this is a vast area, now a reserved forest with beautiful scenery] and another in the town of Lampang at the monastery of Thart Luang in the district of Gok Kha. There were more than these, but the writer cannot recall them all.

Nirvana

The term nirvana, or more precisely in the above-mentioned cases parinibbana, is used in special reference to the Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas [silent Buddhas] and the arahant disciples, all of whom have eradicated the defilements or the seeds of becoming and birth from their minds. Such a term cannot be used for the passing away of worldlings since they have not been delivered from the bondage of defilements. Having departed from this plane, worldlings take birth in another, and having departed from that plane, they take birth in still another plane, which may be better or worse, depending on their karma. A human being may be reborn an animal through his own accumulation of karma which is more animal-like than human. Even in the animal plane there are still several grades, but it can be said that there are more channels leading to it than those leading to another human birth or to birth as invisible beings which are higher than humans. This is due to the nature of the [untrained and irreligious] minds being bent on evil influences, which are more appealing than the good. Thus animals can be found to be more in abundance than human beings and the invisible beings of the higher planes.

All these beings, however, be they human, sub-human or super-human, have one thing in common: they have within their own minds the seeds of birth and becoming, and as such, they are all to continue the series of birth and consequent death, and their passing way cannot be called parinibbana. It is those who have their minds absolutely purified while still maintaining their bodies that can be said to enter into the condition of parinibbana at the dissolution of their bodies.

Monopoly But Within Reach of All

Those whose minds are purified are completely detached from the body, which is dissolving in the final moments called death. They have no more lingering desire for or

attachment to anything or anyone, external or internal, far or near. Such a departure is a true farewell to the aggregates, with no fear or apprehension, with no hope of going elsewhere, with no thoughts of further experiencing the fruits of good or evil. There is at that moment only the stability and unshakability characteristic of the delivered mind, with no profit or loss to be derived from the mundane world. They are beyond time and space in the sense of not being confined by time or space, without even a grain of the mundane to defile the mind. This is the parinibbana of those who have done away with defilements, who are completely detached from the condition of the body, whether during its lifetime or at the moment of its dissolution.

This is the monopoly of those whose minds are purified and which cannot be realized by anyone who has not absolutely purified his mind first. It is diametrically opposed to external property which can be forcibly taken possession of by whomever is powerful enough to say that might is right. But in another sense, it belongs to everyone who cares and dares to fulfil the causes leading to its realization. The Venerable Acharn was congratulated for his attainment by the arahants and was also revered and worshipped by people from all parts of the country because he was true to the dharma and to his exertion, and that is why he was able to realize the truth. He was able to treat the body as it should be treated, never making a burden out of it. What remained with him was the truth not subject to change or limited by time.

The Therapeutical Effect of Dharma

The Venerable Acharn was taken ill several times while staying in the forests of Chiangmai. Had he relied on conventional medicines and physicians, he would have passed away long before. And in any case, that would have been what he called 'breathing through another's nostrils'. He would cure himself by therapeutically applying the dharma to himself whenever he fell ill. This was the constant practice of the Venerable Acharn, who preferred not to rely on conventional medicines and physicians, even long afterwards when he was steadily weakened by age.

He was once staying with three other bhikkhus in a malaria-infested forest and one of the bhikkhus contracted the disease. There was at that time absolutely no medicine, so there was nothing whatsoever to alleviate its symptoms. That bhikkhu had to suffer intensely from its attacks. In the morning and evening, the Venerable Acharn would pay him a visit and instruct him on how to make use of dharma which had proved to be such an effective remedy for him. But for that bhikkhu it was useless. His strength of will was still underdeveloped. He surrendered himself to the chills until the fever abated of its own accord. Possibly the Venerable Acharn was annoyed by this weakness and thus pretended to sternly scold that bhikkhu.

'You are called a Maha [one who can read Pali, the scriptural language], but where is the knowledge you studied from the scriptures now? What is it doing that you cannot call it to your rescue? What a waste of time and effort for that title of Maha you have got! The purpose of learning is to make use of that knowledge in time of an emergency, but what kind of knowledge is your knowledge? It's practically useless. You are going to die and all that knowledge which you took so much time to gain cannot be called on to help you. What was the purpose of your studying? I am not a Maha, not even of the lowest grade [there are nine grades altogether]. What I have with me are only the five

themes of meditation³⁷ taught to me by my Preceptor on my ordination day. It seems the more you learn, the weaker you become, weaker even than an uneducated woman. You are a man and also a Maha. Why are you such a weakling? During this illness you have done nothing which justifies your manhood and bhikkhuhood. Maybe it would be better to change your man's dress, for that of a woman. Then this illness, seeing that you are a woman, may take pity on you and soften its attack.

'You have never once acted like a man, each time I have come here, but have always been overcome by distress. What's the use of mind-development and the title of Maha? What is the meaning of changeability? Does it mean to cry for your mother in time of illness? If you cannot endure even this degree of suffering, you are sure to be hopelessly defeated in the critical moments when the body is going to dissolve! You have been defeated at the outset. What hope is there now for realizing the Noble Truth of Suffering? One who is delivered from suffering must be able to face whatever degree of this Noble Truth comes to him. You have been knocked out in the first round! What hope is there left for you now?'

The Venerable Acharn paused for a while and looked at the patient who was reacting to the remedy with a tearful face. Seeing that this might have been too strong, he softened his tone and said, 'But in fact I am sure you will recover soon.'

He might have formulated a new prescription at night, preparing a milder kind of medicine for the patient who was still weak-willed, for next morning, and the days that followed, he changed his method of curing. He spoke with a soft, consolatory tone, looking as if he were just another physician. His words were gentle, cheering, and motherly, which produced a soothing effect on that bhikkhu who recovered steadily, although slowly. It took several months before he was completely recovered from the illness.

The Venerable Acharn was always resourceful in his ways of curing illnesses of both the minds and the bodies of his disciples. He was able to adopt suitable methods and adapt himself to suit the circumstances in which his help was needed.

Suffering and Pain Must Be Contemplated and Then Detached From

During the critical moments of intense pain or a challenging problem, the Venerable Acharn would exert all the strength of his mindfulness and wisdom to deal with the situation. Whether during an illness or in the face of a vehement counter-attack on the part of lurking defilements, mindfulness and wisdom were called into play and operated dynamically day and night to break the deadlock. The answer would then be found, the blind alley forced open and once again the path cleared of hindrances. This had been his personal experience from the beginning of his practice to his final achievement. Later, when those practicing under his guidance fell ill, he would teach to them the technique of countering the pain and suffering produced by the illness, warning them against depending entirely on medical treatment. This was the technique of

³⁷ This is meditation on the nature or repulsiveness of the body, beginning with hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin. In all there are thirty-two such themes of meditation on the repulsiveness of the body. The five listed here are an abbreviated form covering only the externals of the body, the other twenty-seven covering the internal parts of the body.

contemplating such pain and suffering as manifestations of natural phenomena. These sufferings, so he said, are the manifestations of the Noble Truth, be they sufferings of the body or the mind. They are for us to contemplate. It does not become a bhikkhu to be victimized by these sufferings like a person uninformed in the way of dharma.

From past experiences, he never neglected to extract a practical lesson from these sufferings of the body whenever they threatened to impose themselves upon his mind. It was on such occasions that he was able to improve his method of dealing with the situation and strengthen his mindfulness and wisdom. Never did he allow any suffering or pain to attack him without any counter-attack on his part, for it was on such occasions that all resources had to be mobilized and all strength utilized in full. This is at the same time a test, being a kind of measurement of the ability of mindfulness and wisdom at the moment, and a rehearsal which serves to predict to a great extent success or failure in the critical hour. In this way, whatever deficiencies there were could be corrected, with mindfulness and wisdom steadily improved as a preparation for the real decisive battle which must come sooner or later.

When mindfulness and wisdom are sufficiently developed, the aspirant will not be under any apprehension about the Noble Truth of Suffering. The prompt action of mindfulness and wisdom makes him unshakeable in the midst of the raging storm of suffering that is threatening to batter him to pieces from all directions. His shelter and haven now is his own mindfulness and wisdom which can alone neutralize the fury of the storm and boil all manifestations of suffering down to the three common characteristics [of impermanence, flux, not self], being thereby unaffected by such manifestations of natural phenomena. The moment of the dissolution of the body is one in which the threatening power of suffering reaches its zenith, and it is only mindfulness and wisdom which are adequately developed that can counter this tyrannical influence. For such an aspirant, the problem is solved - dying he becomes a victor, living he is happier. He has fought his way to security and may be called a super-power who has conquered, not anyone else, but his own defilements. It is in view of this great benefit that contemplation of suffering and pain is always recommended.

His Inward Abilities and Stirring Instructions

The Venerable Acharn was a model of both external practice in his endurance, courage and contentment, which has never been excelled by any of his disciples, and his inward abilities of clairvoyance, clairaudience and telepathy. He was able to communicate with invisible beings of various kinds, thereby seeing them and hearing their voices from far and near. His ability to 'see' into the minds of men and animals was wonderful since he was able to recollect thoughts and moods which disciples had long since forgotten. Very often, his first mention of such thoughts or moods failed to produce an effect on the thinker who had long forgotten that he had ever cherished such a thought or had been overcome by that mood.

Under the guidance and training of the Venerable Acharn, a disciple need not be in his presence. They could be some distance away, but whatever it was they were thinking could not be kept a secret from him. Every wild and uncontrolled thought was sure to be brought up either at the time set aside for instruction or some time later. But for those who dared to think nasty thoughts in his presence, whether during the instruction time or dharma-discussion, they would be sternly reproached at that very moment.

According to several Achans who were his disciples in the town of Chiangmai, his psychic abilities were very wonderful and at the same time fearful. His mind-reading ability was especially fearful since the moment they were absent-minded and allowed wrong thoughts to gain control, they would immediately be warned or scolded. Under his guidance, therefore, everyone was bound to be strictly mind-controlled, since there was nothing which could be concealed from his all-seeing mind. Sometimes his disciples, knowing about his psychic powers, could not help being afraid of him even when they were in their own rooms or monasteries or wherever they happened to be. Later, when they came to see him, their own fear would then become the topic of his instruction. He would explain to them how everything in this world, including man, is not a finished product. Before anything can be put to use, it has to undergo various processes that require effort, skill and knowledge.

'Since you are not perfect, you are under the guidance of a teacher and need training and development. Why then are you so much afraid of a teacher's scolding and pointing out your faults? What if a teacher does not do so? Most certainly you would think him to be indifferent and therefore unworthy of being a teacher. These are all going to extremes. All of this is surrendering yourselves to the monkey-mind which restlessly jumps up and down on a rotting branch of a tree and finally tumbles to the ground when the branch snaps. Which would you rather be, a monkey or to be scolded by your teacher who is interested in your development? The choice is up to you.'

A Living Death

In encouraging his disciples to exert themselves and to not be afraid of death, the Venerable Achan sometimes delivered strong and stirring sermons telling how he, in his resolve, had faced death without fear, saying to the effect that whoever is afraid of death through exertion will have to come back and die innumerable deaths. Whoever is not afraid of death will be able to reduce his deaths or to remove all deaths, including birth and becoming. Such a person is destined to the condition of no return where he is not forced to shoulder all sufferings as at present.

'I experienced intense pain and suffering because of my exertion and resolve and lost consciousness three times. Yet I survived all to become your teacher. You should ask yourselves just how much you are inclined towards exertion which would justify your fear. Have you lost consciousness that you should be so afraid of death? Without temporary death it is unlikely that you will be able to realize the wonders of the dharma. This is what I have done,' he said, 'whether anyone believes it or not. This is how I have realized the dharma, which makes it impossible for me to teach you to indulge in eating and sleeping, so that defilements will be afraid of you. The defilements will ridicule you if you indulge yourselves, knowing that you can achieve nothing but a living death.'

A Severe Reprobation-The Lion's Roar

Sometimes a sermon such as this would cause an undesirable reaction in one of his bhikkhu disciples, who would mentally complain that such exertion would be too much for him. 'If one has to lose consciousness before reaching nirvana,' one bhikkhu thought, 'then I'd better stay here in the world, regardless of the kind of suffering I must encounter. Other people also experience this suffering. Why then should I be afraid of it? No one has

ever been known to have lost consciousness because of this suffering. Whoever wants to go to nirvana can freely go there, but I prefer to stay here and share suffering with others. After all, it is far better than smelling chloroform in order to enter nirvana!

A few seconds after this wild thought on the part of that bhikkhu had passed away, the Venerable Acharn's sermon abruptly changed both in subject and tone. To the surprise of everyone, the Venerable Acharn was heard to thunder out his retort in the severest manner as follows:

'Do you think I am lying to you? If you don't believe me, why don't you go away? It's useless for you to stay here where you were never invited to come in the first place. You came here by yourself; you should therefore leave by yourself. The dharma of the Buddha is not for "empty people"³⁸³⁸ like you. Shame on you for having thoughts such as this while wearing the kasaya robes [characteristic of bhikkhuhood]. Anyone who dons these robes is looked up to as one who has faith in the dharma. You now contradict the Path of Deliverance, proclaimed by the Buddha.

'You are free to go wherever you can to find fun and entertainment to your heart's content. And if later you have realized any dharma there, please come back and teach me so that I can thank you with all my heart. What I teach you and everyone is nothing but the truth, that one who wishes to be delivered from suffering must not be afraid of death. You do not believe this and want to experience births and deaths in the worlds of suffering. You are free to do so, but why do you contradict the dharma which serves as teacher in place of the Buddha? You are making yourself an enemy of the dharma and an obstacle to others who still want to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha. Besides doing harm to yourself, your wrong idea has become detrimental to the dharma and to other people.

'I thought you had come here to develop yourself and to glorify Buddhism little thinking that you would cherish such a perverse thought. Now I know that you are both the destroyer of yourself and of Buddhism. If from now on you do not try to correct yourself, you will inflict destructive suffering on both yourself and others. We have learned that before his Enlightenment the Buddha passed out three times due to intense suffering. Do you think that the Buddha lied? What's the use of your being a Buddhist and a dhutanga bhikkhu now that you don't believe in the dharma and in the Buddha who proclaimed that dharma? How worthless you are, being human only through your breathing! Spiritually speaking, you are suffering a living a death, a corpse assuming human form, and this only because of your perverse thought.

'Make up your mind now which way you are going to go for your own benefit and security. I know from my own experience that there is no better way than the one I have taken. So too the Buddha and his Arahant disciples. What I have been teaching others is nothing but my own direct experience in that direction.'

As far as is known, this was his strongest instruction and his severest reproach. What is given here is but the salient part of that instruction. His disciples were all overwhelmingly frightened, being quite shocked by his tone and the topic of his reprobation. The bhikkhu who was the cause of this was much more frightened than all of the others and was soon convinced that such a thought was highly obnoxious to a person of his station [a

³⁸ This is the literal translation from the Pali meaning people who are self-deluded or governed completely by defilements, and as such they are totally blind to the truth and cannot understand it.

dhutanga bhikkhu]. There wasn't a trace of stubbornness left in his mind and from then on the Venerable Acharn's sermon and tone changed, being at first less vehement and then more consolatory.

At the end of this instruction, when the assembly was dismissed, all the bhikkhus were bubbling over, asking one another who it was that had caused the Venerable Acharn to give out such a 'Lion's Roar'. They had never before heard such a tone in his instruction and were sure that, whoever it was, the thought must have been a truly perverse one, flagrantly contradicting the dharma. Otherwise, the subject of the sermon and its tone would not have changed so abruptly. As usual, it did not take long to find out who the culprit was as he readily admitted that it was he who had cherished such an evil thought, and that he was now convinced of this by the Venerable Acharn's reprobation, which, in fact, he deserved.

The dhutanga bhikkhus under the Venerable Acharn's training and guidance were ready to admit their faults, regarding them sometimes as amusing and at other times as valuable moral lessons for better self-control.

The Nature of a Worldling's Mind

The Venerable Acharn knew only too well the nature of the worldling's mind. He would immediately put a stop to all wandering thoughts which were detrimental to the development of that person by means of his telepathic power, which was only too well known to his bhikkhu disciples. Other thoughts, being not so serious, he would not bother to mention. He knew full well how impossible it would have been to have curbed all stray thoughts in a worldling's mind. It would have been too much for the undeveloped mind to be subjected to such complete control. Those who were able to withstand his rigorous discipline, however, both mental and physical, for any length of time were found to be well-advanced in mind-development, being blessed with poise and peace of mind. Their development of mindfulness-and-wisdom made them reliably 'immune' to whatever conditions or circumstances they met with.

Habits, be they good or bad, do not develop without causes. They are produced by repetition until they become a man's second nature. An evil habit is difficult to overcome since it has a strong drag on the mind, whereas a good habit always gives the mind the power of uplift. It is therefore important that parents implant in the minds of their children desirable habits, before it is too late. This may be done by finding them nurses with good habits, for instance.

Spiritual Invulnerability

Just as in military training a student is forced to undergo various exercises until he is able to withstand all kinds of weapons, so in spiritual matters a disciple is made completely immune to tempting and threatening influences, with his mind well-balanced in the midst of any and all disturbances.

Such is the state of perfect peace or deliverance or nirvana, which to worldlings seems to be something dull and dry, someplace bleak and barren. Generally speaking, nirvana is taken to refer to a place in which there is no fun or entertainment, fun and

entertainment being things that most people are very much attached to. Few Buddhists will aspire to nirvana since it is the condition upon which people cannot speculate. This is unlike the idea of peace, which is the result of morality and mind-development. Some even picture nirvana as being a town in complete silence, with no sounds of animals, men, cars, etc., whatsoever, and, what is more important, with no hope or ambition left. Although describing nirvana and the condition of nirvana is beyond the power of words and thoughts, it is an accepted fact that one who aspires to nirvana must have no hope or ambition left-which refers to hopes and ambitions for material or secular returns [wealth, fame, recognition, power, etc.] Such an aspirant looks for a more subtle happiness born of inner peace and poise which can be maintained even amidst a troubled environment. This is far superior to the pleasures and enjoyments derived from external sources of happiness, which are changeable, fleeting and oppressive.

An aspirant to nirvana accepts the truth, being ready to face it and admit it, despite the fact that the truth is sometimes unpleasant and hurts his defilements or ego. He refuses to be ruled over by wrong desire and is willing to rectify himself while treading the Path, which results in peace and bliss which are self-evident even though such peace and bliss will not produce a large sum of money or make a millionaire of him in the worldly sense. His happiness and peace and security never have anything to do with wealth. Enormous wealth is not an absolute guarantee for happiness, especially if it is acquired through wrong means. On the contrary, in the end it is known to become a liability rather than an asset, a curse rather than a boon. This is what wise men, especially aspirants to nirvana, realize and always bear in mind.

Vesakha Sermon in Chiangmai

During his stay in Chiangmai, there were not many dhutanga bhikkhus under his training since he preferred staying deep in the wilds most of the time, but he did receive several letters from his eminence Chao Khun Dhammacetiya of Wat Bodhi Somphorn in the town of Udorn Thani, inviting him back to that town. He neither answered these letters nor did he accept the invitation.

Then in the year BE 2482-2483 [CE 1939-1940], his eminence himself went to the Venerable Acharn's place in the wilds in order to invite him in person. Seeing this, the Venerable Acharn answered his eminence's previous letters all at the same time, saying that he had received them all, but as they were small ones, he decided not to bother to reply. Now that the 'big letter' had come - which meant his eminence himself he would give his reply. He laughed after having said this, and so did his eminence, who then personally invited the Venerable Acharn to return to the town of Udorn Thani which he had left so many years before and where all of his disciples longed for his instruction. His eminence said that he came on behalf of the people there. Hearing this the Venerable Acharn accepted the invitation. It was then agreed upon to go in early May, BE 2483 [CE 1940].

Before leaving his shelter in the forest for Wat Chedi Luang in Chiangmai, a great number of terrestrial angels came to see him, all of whom requested him to stay on in that place, saying that they had all been blessed with great peace and happiness while he was staying there. They told him that his radiance of loving-kindness covered their realm in all directions, both day and night. With his departure, they would be less happy and it would also be less convenient in the administration of their affairs. He told them that he had already accepted the invitation of the people of Udorn Thani and that he had to

keep his word. He said that a bhikkhu must honour his promises since morality is something which is always to be expected of a bhikkhu. Without truthfulness, a bhikkhu's life and practice would be valueless.

In May, the Venerable Acharn with the disciples who would accompany him to Udorn Thani, left their places in the wilds and journeyed to Wat Chedi Luang to await the devotees from Udorn Thani who were to come there to welcome him to their town. The Venerable Acharn On of Wat Thipyarath Nimit and a group of lay devotees from Udorn Thani then arrived at Wat Chedi Luang.

During his one week stay in the town of Chiangmai, the lay devotees there requested him to stay with them for a longer period, but he could not have accepted their invitation any more than he could have accepted that of the terrestrial angels since he had already promised the people of Udorn Thani that he would go there. Before leaving Chiangmai, however, the Venerable Chao Kkun Phra Rajkavi and the Chiangmai devotees invited him to deliver the Vesakha-Puja sermon so that the people would remember him for a long time to come. The writer also happened to go to Chiangmai at that time and was thus fortunate to have listened to his Vesakha sermon, which lasted three hours. His sermon was so impressive that it is still fresh in the memory to this day, but here it will be given only in brief.

The Buddha's Birth and Other People's Births

'Vesakha is the day the Buddha was born, attained to Enlightenment and completely passed away. There is a significant difference between the birth of the Buddha and that of other beings, in that the Buddha having been born, was later not overcome by ignorance. He is one who has realized the nature of the world in which he was born, lived, and completely passed away. This was possible through the All-Seeing Eye of Wisdom which is called Enlightenment. At the moment of his complete passing away, he bid farewell to the body which had served as an instrument for doing good to the last. His going was well-gone, as befitting the teacher of the Three Worlds. Before leaving the body, which could no longer be maintained, he gave its the dharma to be teacher in his stead. We are all born as human beings due to our record of good in the past. It is important, however, that we should not be over-confident, but should replenish our store of good for the sake of our own security in the future. If we neglect to do so, then we shall be neglecting our own future and any and all adverse and undesirable effects will belong to us, in spite of ourselves.

'All the kinds of degrees of suffering and happiness, progress and retrogression, belong to those who fulfil their causes. This means not only those who have fulfilled such causes in the past and who are suffering or enjoying their effects now, but also those who are fulfilling their particular causes at this moment and who are destined to suffer or enjoy their effects in the future. Such results are not the sole possession of anyone in particular, but belong to all those who care to and who dare to fulfil their respective causes.

No Contempt for What is Others' Karma

'It is in view of this fact that a Buddhist is taught not to treat with contempt those who are suffering the results of evil done by them in the past, being thereby in a state of helpless

misery and wretchedness. We could very possibly be in their condition, or even worse. And they could be like us, or in an even better position. This is the Law of Karma or of Dharma, for self observation as well as the observation of others' good and evil, and also for selecting those causes which are desirable and abandoning those which are undesirable. From the day of ordination until now, every possible moment has been used in self-observation, adopting the good and giving up the evil which appear and disappear in the mind.

'It is by means of the mind that various kinds of karma have been performed, and it is in the mind their effects are accumulated. This is the truth which is self-evident and beyond doubt. Anyone who does not believe in the truth of karma producing effects on the mind is helplessly blind and lost in his journeying through life. Such people, having been brought up and taken care of by their parents, still cannot understand how, because of their parents' tender love, they have benefitted and reached their present age. What they are aware of are the bodies which they presently call their own, preferring to brush aside the sweat and labour of their parents who had taken such great pains to feed and nourish their bodies so that they are able to enjoy them at present. The body needs food and drink for its health and growth. If the attempts to supply the body with food and drink cannot be called 'karmic causes', what else can they be called? The body, being regularly supplied with food and drink, can maintain its health and steadily grow to maturity. If this cannot be called 'karmic effect', what else can it be called?

'Good and evil, also happiness and suffering, have been experienced by all sentient beings. If they were not karmic causes and effects, what else should they be? Just think of those who commit suicide, and the significance of the mind as the doer of karma will become more obvious. What else is the cause of death but the mind itself? Were this again not to be accepted as karma, there would now be no hope for understanding this truth. Karma is within oneself. It is oneself who is constantly performing causes and experiencing their effects. This truth is obvious and self-provable. Should karma follow its doer like a dog following its master, then it would be more appropriately called 'dog', not karma³⁹. But karma [karmic cause] is the doing of good and evil in thought, word, and deed, and karmic effects manifest themselves in the happiness and suffering experienced by sentient beings throughout the worlds, including, of course, sentient beings who cannot understand any more truth than how to feed their bodies and stay alive as long as possible.'

At the end of the sermon, the Venerable Chao Khun Rajkavi expressed his appreciation for the sermon, saying that it was especially long and delightful. In reply the Venerable Acharn said that the sermon was rather long since he was getting old and might not be able to return to Chiangmai. These words were prophetic for he never again returned to Chiangmai.

From Chiangmai to Bangkok

The Venerable Acharn was seen off at the railway station by his eminence Somdet Phra Maha Viravong, who was at that time Phra Rajkavi, and a large number of lay devotees, and, of course, a large number of angels. The Venerable Acharn said there were many

³⁹ A dog follows its master outside, whereas karmic effects are inherent and are accumulated within the mind itself. In other words, a dog and its master are two separate things, whereas karmic cause and karmic effect are accumulated in one and the same thing: the mind.

angels in the air, coming from all directions to see him off from the Wat to the station. When the train was about to pull out of the station, he was increasingly occupied, now conversing with the people at the station and then sending his mental thanks to the angels. It was when the train pulled out from the station that he had more time for the angels and mentally gave his blessings to them.

Like human beings, some of the angels were overcome by sorrow which was made manifest through words and gesture. Quite a number of them took pains to follow the fast-moving train for a considerable distance until he sent them his thoughts of thankfulness and urged them to go back to their domains. They all sorrowfully returned without any hope of his returning to stay with them once again. That was perhaps the last time that they saw him since he did not return to Chiangmai, and he did not mention whether they went to listen to his sermons while he was dwelling in the Northeastern towns of Udorn Thani and Sakol Nakhorn.

In Bangkok he took up his residence in Wat Boromnivat at the request of Phra Maha Viravong. [He had to come south to Bangkok before going to the Northeast since there was at that time no direct communication between the North and the Northeast.] There were many people who came to see him there [having heard of his fame and ability as a unique dhutanga bhikkhu well-versed in mind-development and insight]. Some of the many questions put to him will be quoted here.

Mind-Control is the Essence of Precepts

Question: It is known that you observe only one precept, not 227 [the articles in the code of monastic discipline called Patimokkha] like other bhikkhus.

The Venerable Acharn: Yes, this is so.

Question: What is it, then?

The Venerable Acharn: It is the mind.

Question: Then what about the 227, do you not observe them?

The Venerable Acharn: I always control my mind so as not to violate any of the Buddha's prohibitions, be they the 227 or any other. Thus, I can rest satisfied that I have never violated the Buddha's prohibitions. Whether this includes the 227 or not may be decided by anyone and everyone. From the day of ordination, I have never neglected to control my mind, which is the source of all words and deeds.

Question: But why should the observance of precepts have anything to do with the mind'?

The Venerable Acharn: And why not? Without safeguarding the mind, what would be the result of morality? Only a corpse does not have to safeguard its mind, words or deeds. But does any corpse have morality, having no intention whatever to observe it? If it observes any kind of morality at all, it should be called a 'corpse's morality', which produces no practical result. I am not a corpse and cannot observe a corpse's morality. This is why, in my case, morality must always have something to do with the mind, which is the producer of both good and evil.

Question: But according to the Scripture, morality involves the control of words and deeds. This seems to suggest that morality has nothing to do with the mind.

The Venerable Acharn: That may be right in one sense, but before a person's words can be taken care of, his mind must of necessity be involved. In other words, mind-control must come first before word control and deed control. The mind is the origin or source of all controls, even in secular matters. In curing a disease, for example, the causes of that disease must be found out and dealt with. If, in observing morality no mind-control is involved, the result will be that that morality is blemished, deficient, defiled, and so forth, all resulting in the corresponding deterioration of the doctrine. Such morality, which is divorced from mind, cannot be of any benefit to the person who observes it or to Buddhism as a whole. This, however, is not the view of a scholar but that of a bhikkhu who lives in the wilds and who studies dharma from whatever is in the forests, be it the leaves of a tree, mountain streams, precipices, caves or the sounds of animals and birds that can be seen and heard all around. There is no academic foundation to be found here. This is only an explanation of morality on the part of a bhikkhu living in the wilds.

Question: What, then, is the nature of morality? What can be called morality in the real sense of the term?

The Venerable Acharn: The thought that is not allowed to run wild, being able to weigh properly the pros and cons of anything involved, the manifestation through the three channels [thoughts, words, deeds] which are not divorced from proper control - these are the usual and habitual conditions of a person who observes morality. However, it is not possible to separate the characteristics of morality from the person who observes it, not even from the blissful results of its observance. This is not like a house and its owner, each being obviously a separate entity. One cannot merge into the other. But this is not so in the case of morality. Otherwise, morality or its results would have been commercial goods and then lost or stolen, thus bringing disaster and danger to the person who observes it. It is because the results of morality *cannot* be separated from the person who observes it that morality can produce true bliss and security. There is no attachment in it such as can be found in the person who is attached to his property, even on his death-bed. In a case such as this, such a person will become an earthbound spirit, suffering the results of his own attachment, being unable to take birth in another plane of consciousness which should have been his had he not been so passionately attached to his property.

An Elder's (Mahathera's) Question

One time an Elder invited the Venerable Acharn for a private session of questions and answers.

The Elder: You have always preferred the solitude of the wilds. What do you do when questions or doubts arise? I am here in Bangkok surrounded by the Scripture and scholars and yet there are times when I am at my wit's end. You are known to be alone most of the time, with no access to Scripture or to scholars. What do you do for help when doubts, questions or obstacles arise?

The Venerable Acharn: May it please your eminence, I have been studying and listening to the dharma throughout my waking hours, day and night. Never during my waking

hours has the mind been dissociated from dharma, by which all doubts have been cleared up and all problems dealt with, one after another. In such a way are the defilements counteracted, fought against and eradicated. It is in the mind that all problems, obstacles and defilements occur, be they external or internal, crude or subtle, far or near, great or small. It is also in the mind that all these things are conquered. There is no need to worry about turning to anyone for help when such difficulties occur. From my experience there is no better weapon with which to fight against defilements and to solve problems, and this is also in complete accordance with the Buddha's saying '*atta hi attano natho* - one is the master of oneself', the truth of which has been all this time evident to me. It is the dharma or well-developed mindfulness-and-wisdom which always comes to my rescue, always functioning promptly and effectively.'

In some cases it took an unusually long time before some hurdles could be crossed, but in the end it was never beyond the power of mindfulness-and-wisdom which had to be developed specially for such particular occasions. This is why I always prefer the seclusion of the wilds, where I can come to grips with all problems through self-help. And if it happened that I died, there would be nothing for others to worry about for I would depart alone, troubling no one. May your eminence forgive me for this crude answer.

The Elder, however, appeared to be greatly interested and impressed in the Venerable Acharn's explanation, giving whole-hearted appreciation that the Venerable Acharn was indeed a competent bhikkhu able to help himself in the seclusion of the wilds. He agreed with the Venerable Acharn that the dharma recorded in the Scripture and the dharma taking place in the mind were on far different levels. Even the dharma as recorded in the Scripture cannot be as absolutely reliable now as it had been in the early centuries after the Buddha's complete passing away. With the passage of time there were bound to be deficiencies due to the defilements of the later compilers of the texts. Such being the case, the dharma in the Scriptures and the dharma in the mind are sure to be on different levels producing different 'tastes', despite the fact that both are called dharma.

The Elder: I have now realized, through your answer, how foolish I have been and am, but I have also benefited by my foolishness, for had I not asked you my foolish question, I would never have listened to your wise reply. Today I have obviously lost my foolishness and gained your wisdom.

There is one more question that I would like to ask you. We read in the Scripture that it had been the habit of, the Buddha's disciples to go and see the Buddha, even from a remote place, when they encountered questions or other difficulties. Why didn't they help themselves on such occasions instead of preferring to go and see the Buddha for his help?

The Venerable Acharn: When there is someone to look to for help, it is natural that others should prefer the more convenient way of seeking such help whenever possible. This is especially true in the case of the Buddha, who, as all his disciples knew was able to give whatever help they needed. In my own case, were the Buddha still alive today, I would not hesitate to go to him instead of desperately struggling for so long with my own unguided efforts. This way of struggling is very difficult and inconvenient, but nowadays there isn't any alternative. This is the drawback of the lack of a competent teacher.

Often an aspirant feels he is groping in the dark and is always wasting time due to trial and error. It is through steadfastness of aim and dedicated effort that I have achieved

what I have, crossing one hurdle after another.

The Elder asked him many other questions, but the above may be enough to give the readers some useful ideas about practical dharma.

While the Venerable Acharn was in Bangkok, he was often invited to partake of a meal in lay devotees' homes, but he didn't accept one invitation since any such invitation would have disrupted his daily routine after mealtime.

From Bangkok he travelled to Nakhorn Raja Sima [Korat] in response to the invitation of the people there. He stayed at Wat Salavan, a forest monastery, where he was approached by many seeking answers to questions. From amongst those questions, there is one which has impressed the writer up to this day, despite a rather bad memory in other cases. The questioner was in fact a lay devotee who was sincerely earnest in mind-development, and his question was somewhat a searching one, with the purpose of testing the depth of the renowned wisdom of the Venerable Acharn.

Hungerlessness Means Selflessness

Question: Could the Venerable Acharn kindly tell us the purpose of your coming to Korat at this time? Is it for the sole benefit of the people here, or is it for the sake of your fruition and Nirvana as well?

The Venerable Acharn: I have no hunger or delusion by which to look for outside things which cause suffering. A person who is hungry is always restless, running after one thing and then another. In his hunger he catches hold of everything he can, only to be later consumed by it. I seek after nothing, for what is the use of seeking anything when I have everything within myself? All other things are but shadows, not substances. What's the use of taking hold of shadows? All the Four Noble Truths are completely within the mind and they have all been realized. If there is no delusion, what would be the use in running after other things?

As long as there is breath in the body and there are persons who can be helped, so long is there service for their own sakes. How difficult it is to find a mind that is dharma - more difficult than finding a jewel. One such mind is more precious than a treasure worth millions, the mind that is dharma being able to bestow peace and bliss upon others far more than any treasure worth no matter how much. Examples of such minds can be found in the Buddha and his Noble Disciples. Such people are worth more than any treasure since they value the results of their good deeds more than any amount of money. They are willing to be poor so that others may be happy. The fool, however, always makes a religion of money, thinking nothing of others or of the means by which to obtain that money. He stops at nothing, stoops to anything. He brushes aside all concepts of what is morally evil, thinking that he can go scot-free by doing so. These are the differences between a good person and an evil person, dharma and money. He is wise who, having known the differences, can choose the right way before it is too late and there is only time for regret.

It must also be noted that these differences cover not only characteristics, but also results. These are undeniable and irresistible, belonging to whoever has chosen them in accordance with their kind. This is, therefore, the cause of a variety of differences in sentient beings, as can be seen nowadays, with regards to their planes of consciousness,

appearances, tendencies, and happiness to be individually experienced. This is the law of nature, which, unlike man-made laws, cannot be avoided or mocked.

Question: I would like again to ask the forgiveness of the Venerable Acharn for having asked this question, but I have long heard of your fame, which has spread far and wide. Everyone, bhikkhus and laymen alike, has concluded that you are not an ordinary bhikkhu. Your answer has revealed my own hunger and delusion. I have taken interest in the practical aspect of Buddhism for some time and have been blessed with some inner results of peace. It is a great boon to me to have this opportunity of seeing a holy man like the Venerable Acharn. Your answer has convinced me more than I could have expected. There is no more doubt in the dharma as far as a worldling is concerned. I now know that it all depends on myself how fast and how far I shall be able to progress in the dharma.

The Venerable Acharn: My answer is of the same nature as your question. I am not hungry and self-deluded, therefore what else should I seek? I used to be hungry and self-deluded during my strenuous practice in the wilds alone. It is only after I have been able to stand on my own two feet that various rumours are about. Many were the times I lost consciousness and was confronted with death during those ordeals. What's the use of merely spreading rumours now? There is already a treasure within every one of you, but you must put your shoulder to the wheel, trying your best to uncover it. Dig it up and make use of it now! It's no use depending on a bhikkhu or religious rites at the approach of death or after that. That would be [according to a Thai saying] 'scratching where there is no itch'. Let me warn you, the right thing to do is where there is an itch, there you must scratch. This means making every possible effort for the sake of detachment from what, in point of fact, always belongs to the world and never to you. Through your own self-delusion you have attempted to take possession of what belongs to the world, forgetting the real and invaluable treasure within yourself. Those possessions are in themselves neutral. They can bestow practical benefits on their users or they can be their troublemakers and consuming fires. This all depends on their user's attitude of mind: his wisdom or attachment.

Think of those who have attained to the Cessation of Suffering, who have become our refuge. Do you think that they never had possessions which they highly valued, that they had been attached to? Do you think that you are the only ones who are now wealthy and blessed with so many valuable possessions? Why then are you so blindly attached to them? Are there now no places for burying or cremating corpses? If there still are such places, why are you so over-confident in life and why do you indulge in its [fleeting] joys and entertainments, and at the same time refuse to see and listen to and be heedful of the truth?

Were men to be equipped only with such thoughts, how would they be different from animals, except for the fact that when cornered they would be in a position far more miserable than animals? The only way to counteract this tendency is to be competently prepared when you are in a position to do so.

I must apologize for being rather rude, but if the teaching that urges people to do good and avoid evil should be considered rude, then it would mean the dharma or truth has become unacceptable and that the world is nearing its end. What hope is there left for the world that freely allows the doing of evil which results in suffering and which cannot tolerate the truth, regarding it only as something rude?

The above answer is recorded as closely as possible to the answer actually given by the Venerable Acharn in order to preserve its original flavour, so typical of his way of answering questions.

There were other questions concerning dharma put to him wherever he went, but they were too many to be remembered or quoted.

At Udorn Thani

The Venerable Acharn left Nakhorn Raja Sima and continued on his way to Udorn Thani. He reached the town of Khon Kaen, where he was welcomed at the railway station by a great number of people who requested him to break his journey for a time. He said he could not do so, however, since the town was not formerly included in his itinerary.

On reaching Udorn Thani, he first went and stayed with his eminence Chao Khun Dhammacedi at Wat Bodhi Somphorn. There he was reverently welcomed by a great number of people from the various districts of Udorn Thani, and also from the towns of Nong Khai and Sakhol Nakhorn.

From Wat Bodhi Somphorn he went to Wat Nonenivet, where he stayed for the Rains Retreat. Here his eminence Chao Khun Dhammacedi regularly led groups of lay devotees, consisting of government officials, businessmen and common people, to see him every Wan Phra [full moon day, half moon day, and the day before the new moon] for his instruction. His eminence was regarded by the people of Udorn Thani as their benefactor in bringing the Venerable Acharn to them. He had taken pains to go to Chiangmai, which was a great distance from Udorn Thani (at that time there being no direct link between the two or even the two parts of the country. From the Northeast, one had to first travel down to Bangkok, which is in the central part of the country, and then go up to Chiangmai, which is in the North), then into the wilds where the Venerable Acharn was staying and which was still a far distance from the town itself. His eminence had always been keenly interested in the practical side of Buddhism and never tired of engaging himself in conversation or discussion about dharma, especially its practical aspect; he had always been highly impressed with the Venerable Acharn and attended upon his every need during the time he was in Udorn Thani, never neglecting to ask about the health and wants of the Venerable Acharn on the behalf of others. He always urged the people to go to see him for his instruction. If they did not dare go alone, he would willingly volunteer to introduce them to the Venerable Acharn himself.

After the Rains Retreat, the Venerable Acharn preferred a place of seclusion outside the town. The village of Nong Nam Khem, about twelve kilometres from the town, was the place where he stayed for a long period. It was quiet woodland, with lush green forest, quite suitable to him.

While in Udorn Thani during the Rains Retreat, he contributed considerably to the spiritual uplift of both the bhikkhus and samaneras and the lay people, both in the town of Udorn Thani itself and in the neighbouring towns. There was a constant stream of bhikkhus and lay disciples coming to listen to his sermons and making merit with reference to him. Most of them had been his disciples before he had gone to Chiangmai. Having learnt of his return, they were all overjoyed and came to see him for his instruction. He was then about seventy years of age and was still active. In fact, he was habitually dynamic and did not like to stay in any one place for any length of time. He preferred wandering

alone, living a solitary life in the wilds.

Love in Former Lives

As in other places, many people asked him questions, some of which were similar to those put to him elsewhere. There were two important questions, however. The first concerned the character and tendencies inherent in a person's mind, which the Venerable Acharn explained as being that person's former resolution which served as the root-cause sending up visible effects later. Thus it was that person's own motive which produced continued results for himself. The second question dealt with what is commonly called [love at first sight] through having been husband and wife in a previous life or lives.

Question: How can we know whether the love of this man and woman had its origin in their previous lives or that they have just met each other for the first time in this life?

The Venerable Acharn: For ordinary people, there is no way to distinguish the one from the other. In most cases, they fall in love with each other blindly [that is, emotionally], much the same way as a hungry blind man takes everything to his mouth that he takes hold of, irrespective of what it is, how it tastes or its nutritional value. His only purpose each time is to alleviate his pangs of hunger. The same is true of love at first sight in human beings.

In most cases it is very difficult to wait until that kind of love comes. The defilement involved in this matter, lust, doesn't have the ability to be so patient or selective. It grabs at every 'first sight' that is attractive enough, knowing no 'favouritism' and tolerating no frontier or bounds. It is this lust that makes a daredevil of its victim, who is blind to all the laws of decency, morality, culture and moderation. This is the power of lust over the minds of all. Those who do not want to submit unconditionally to its yoke should counteract its all-inclusive power by submitting themselves instead to the process of restraint and neutralization, if not eradication, of its power. Without the development of psychic power for this special purpose, there is no way of knowing whether or not love [or in fact lust] has its origins in a previous life or lives. Thus, only through restraint and moderation can a person curb its overflowing stream and safeguard himself from a helpless wreck in the ocean of so-called love.

Question: What should a husband and wife do if they wish to be with each other again in future lives, so that they won't have to be separated at all.

The Venerable Acharn: A wish can serve only as a guideline or pathway. It must be supported by action or causes for the sake of its fulfilment. Everyone would like to be millionaires, for example, but how many can achieve that goal? Most cherish that wish but lack the energy to fulfil the causes. They remain as poor as ever. This is also true of the love between a husband and wife. If they wish to meet and stay with each other at all times in future lives with happiness, never to be separated from each other at any time, they must have the same views and modes of behaviour and be satisfied with each other, not committing adultery, which destroys the peace of mind of one's spouse and leads to loss of confidence. If both husband and wife have the same wish and can fulfil the above-mentioned causes, being always equally faithful and reliable, then their wishes will certainly be fulfilled since there are causes and the effects of those causes. If they merely cherish such a desire but behave differently from each other, such a wish, however earnest, cannot be fulfilled. Do you want only to be reunited and nothing else?

The layman replied: As far as I can recall, I don't know of any other wish of mine greater than that. I might want to be rich, famous, go to heaven or Nirvana, but I know that I cannot live without my wife. All of my other wishes are second only to this one concerning my wife. I would be glad to have the others as a bonus, if this were possible. I could not help feeling ashamed at first in front of the Venerable Acharn and also feared your scolding, but I think that other people will be more or less the same, the only difference being that they dare not speak out.

The Venerable Acharn (laughing): Then you have to take her along with you wherever you go, is that right?

The layman: I am ashamed to admit that this is true. I cannot become a bhikkhu now because of this fact. My wife would be lonely, without anyone to give her warmth and comfort, to support her financially and in other ways. I have learned from the scriptures that in the heaven realms there are angels, male and female, all blessed with joy and entertainments of various kinds. Surely they must be very happy places to live in. But in the realms of Brahma, there appears to be no such things as in heaven. It must be a very lonely place indeed. Who would one turn to in time of worry and misery? Nirvana seems to be worse than that since there is no response to outer environment. It is completely self-contained, depending upon no one and nothing. What pride and honour could there be from others who have attained to Nirvana in the same way? In the world of man, one who is wealthy and high in rank is respected and honoured by those around him. But does anyone attaining to nirvana ever win such recognition or honour from others in his position? To me it seems that they are all gone forever. This makes me doubt how blissful it can really be for anyone who goes to nirvana. May the Venerable Acharn forgive me for my foolish prattling, but it has troubled me for a long time. It is a good thing that I have expressed my doubt to a wise man such as you.

The Venerable Acharn: The heaven realms, the realms of Brahma and nirvana are not for a person full of doubts like you. They exist for those who have realized their value, each being progressively more advanced than the one(s) below it (them). They are for those who deserve them, and not for you who cannot even dream of them. You cannot go there if your wife is still living. Even if your wife has died, you just wouldn't be able to keep yourself from thinking of her and again wouldn't be able to fulfil the causes by which to go to those realms, which couldn't be as good as your wife. In all those realms, your wife would not be there, and so, in all those realms, no one would be able to give you the 'pleasure' that only your wife could. This is the cause of your doubt, for you fear you will be deprived of such 'pleasure', is that right? [Both the Venerable Acharn and the questioner laugh.]

But you must know that even in this world there are many kinds of pleasure, each one depending on the channel through which it comes. Thus there are pleasant sights coming through the eyes; pleasant sounds coming through the ears; pleasant smells coming through the nose; pleasant tastes coming through the tongue; pleasant touches or warmth coming through the body; and pleasant thoughts coming through the mind. You know how eating is a kind of pleasure or happiness; so is sleep or to be united as husband and wife. It is pleasure through these various doorways that is the prime mover of all activities of people. But again, pleasure or happiness can be classified into different categories or grades, from the happiness of human beings in this world, to that of the angels in the heaven realms, those in the realms of Brahma, and those who have attained to nirvana, nirvana being totally different from the rest. It is impossible, therefore,

in your case for you not to find pleasure in any one thing or any one person alone. Otherwise, you would be able to be physically tied to your beloved wife all the time, without having to eat, sleep, do other kinds of work and make merit in various other ways. Do you think the pleasure from your wife can replace all those functions of the body and work sustain life?

The layman: Oho! How could such a thing be, Venerable Acharn! There have been times when we have quarrelled. It would be impossible to expect everything from her.

This layman was frank and straightforward in his manner of speaking. He was also well-behaved morally and keenly interested in the dharma. He revered the Venerable Acharn deeply. This was why the Venerable Acharn often had informal talks with him whenever he was not receiving other guests and was at his leisure. There were, in fact, few who could talk frankly and fearlessly with the Venerable Acharn.

This layman loved his wife and children very dearly and was at the same time greatly impressed in the Venerable Acharn. Whenever the Venerable Acharn was engaged in receiving guests or in other kinds of work, he would not trouble him with any questions, but would prostrate before the Venerable Acharn [making it known that he was in the hermitage area] and then go to help other bhikkhus and samaneras do some manual work, since he was specially intimate with them. The Venerable Acharn also preferred talking with him informally whenever an occasion permitted.

The Inner Phra (Bhikkhuhood)

The Venerable Acharn was unexcelled in his time as far as the psychic powers of character-reading and telepathy were concerned. His way of treating others, be they guest or disciple, bhikkhu or layman, was particularly personal and individual, there being no established pattern for all people on all occasions.

During his Rains Retreat spent in Wat Nonenivet in the town of Udorn Thani, there were many bhikkhu disciples under his training and guidance. The monastery at that time was far more quiet than it is today because there weren't many people or cars going there. All who went there were well-intentioned and therefore well-behaved. None went to see him with malicious intent, whether deliberate or unwittingly. The bhikkhus and samaneras staying there were able to devote all their time to inner development without being distracted by interruptions of any sort. There were thus quite a number of bhikkhus who achieved what they hoped for.

At night, during the time set aside for teaching his bhikkhus, he would begin his instruction with morality and then move to meditation, wisdom and deliverance. He would then dwell on the practical aspects of dharma - how an aspirant should follow those practices so as to achieve the results of these graded dharma.

He often stressed the importance of the observance of morality, which characterizes the life of a bhikkhu. An aspirant should not overlook the importance of morality, never thinking that it is of little importance. Failure to observe morality breeds lack of shame and will lead to the violation of the other prohibitions. By a respectful observance of morality, an aspirant will not be disturbed by a guilty conscience, and he will, sooner or later, be rewarded with inner bhikkhuhood, which means the Path and Fruition of a stream-enterer, a once-returned, a non-returned, and an arahant, if he couples such

observance with exertion for the sake of meditation and insight. This will enable him to steadily purge his mind of defilements. This is the meaning of the Thai word phra [from the Pali vara, meaning excellent], which means the model of behaviour in words and deeds, and excellence in morality, meditation, wisdom, deliverance, and the insight into deliverance.

Without this inner development, a bhikkhu is consumed by the whisper of his own inferiority complex. He becomes depressed and does not take pride in his ordination. This is not the way of life of the Tathagata's disciple, who must be courageous in avoiding evil and in doing good, in following in the footsteps of the Buddha and in being faithful to himself and to the dharma. Like the Buddha, the Noble Disciple is well-gone, being harmless himself he sows the seeds of harmlessness wherever he goes and stays. He is always absorbed in the flavour of the dharma and is guided by the light of mindfulness-and-wisdom. Never is he cornered by self-delusion. One such as this is a true disciple of the Tathagata. This should be borne in mind by every aspirant.

His Daily Routine- Strength of Will

After the time set aside for instruction was over, any disciple with doubts or problems concerning the process of mind-development could approach him for individual questioning whenever he was not engaged in some other activity.

His regular daily routine, kept wherever he stayed was:

- sitting meditation followed by walking meditation
- going out for alms-food and partaking of his meal
- walking meditation until noon
- if necessary, a nap
- sitting and walking meditation until about 4:00pm.
- sweeping the area he dwelled in and then a bath
- several hours of walking meditation
- several hours of recitation
- several hours of sitting meditation
- sleep, usually four hours at the most.

On special occasions, however, he would continue his sitting meditation throughout the night without any sleep. In his younger days, his exertion was rigorous and resolute, being hardly equalled by anyone in his time. It was when he was older that his exertion was a little lax due to his enfeebled body. Yet there was always a sign of his indomitable strength of will evident to all his disciples. This is contrary to most people whose strength of will is found to follow the inevitable decline of the strength of the body.

Such was the way of practice of one whom Buddhists can look up to as a model. Even after his final victory gained in the wilds of Chiangmai, he took pains to shoulder the task of rendering selfless service to others until the final breaking up of his body. As human beings, each of us has the potential for the same achievement, but apparently there are now but few who will follow him to the end. This is due to the maturity of each individual supported by the four factors of success: love or preference, exertion, dedication, and contemplation, the strength of all combined being still not enough to produce the desired result. With causes which are vastly different, the effects are sure to be as different. This, of course is true of both the meritorious as the demeritorious. It is the

irresistible and infallible truth in all cases and aspects, good and evil, happiness and misery.

The life of the Venerable Acharn was truly impressive, from its beginning to its end. Even during his life-time, his fame spread far and wide, and it is a deplorable fact that there were still many Buddhists who were unable to approach him. This was partly because he preferred spending the greater part of his life in secluded places, hardly ever staying in towns, and partly [perhaps most importantly] because many, despite their being impressed by him and their respect for him, were plagued by their own worries and fears. Some were afraid of the hardships during the journey to his sylvan retreat, for often they had to travel for days from a town by bullock-cart or on foot through forests. Others were discouraged by the ordeal of the way of life and mode of practice that they would have to undergo in training under him: having one meagre meal a day, living in a malaria-infested forest which also abounded in ferocious beasts, etc. Still others were afraid of his scolding and other seemingly cruel treatment. These were the self-created obstacles of many who had to miss this best of opportunities, even though they were his contemporaries and eagerly wished to see him.

There are now a great number of his contemporaries and those of later generations who have realized how the dharma is timeless due to its being time-tested. The dharma is always capable of producing Path and Fruition for whoever is courageous enough to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha and his Noble Disciples. There have been countless such disciples from the time of the Buddha down to the present. The dharma is like a great dam from which flows an inexhaustible supply of nectar, the immortality of nirvana, for those who care and dare to take that Path. Many of these people now regret having missed this best opportunity of their lives.

The Venerable Acharn, who passed away on 10th November BE 2492 (CE 1949), was one of these Noble Disciples found in modern times. The accounts of his passing away will be related below. This fact of his passing away, however, serves to remind us of the inevitable phenomena the body of everyone is subject to: dissolution after formation, decay after birth. What is left after the decay and dissolution of the body, be it the body of the Buddha or the Venerable Acharn, is Absolute Wisdom, Purity, and Loving-kindness.

It now rests with the aspirant as to how much effort he is willing to make to implant such virtues in his mind while he is still in a position to do so. A word of caution for every aspirant - deathbed regret does not pay.

The Inward Cemetery

Another teaching of the Venerable Acharn's, given to the people of the town of Nakhorn Raja Sima, and which has impressed the writer to this day, is summarized here for those readers who might be similarly impressed.

A Buddhist should not forget the fact that he is always carrying a cemetery [corpse] with him. His knowledge and behaviour must not blur his vision of this great truth. There is no telling where or when he himself will become a Cemetery, even while living in a great city [as opposed to staying in the wilds], or being surrounded by relatives and friends [as opposed to living a solitary life]. Whatever he thinks, says or does should always be based on this great truth, otherwise he will have regrets and wish that he had not done so. A person's karma, which is not divorced from the vision of this inner cemetery, will provide

him with an immunity to the power of the defilements. There is no power superior to that of karma [which goes beyond the grave]. It is useless pretending to forget the power of karma or pretending that one is superior to the Buddha. One who does so is sure to be cornered by his own foolish pretensions and assumptions.

The Inward Bodhi-Tree

It is not an exaggeration to say that through his resourcefulness in his methods of teaching and training, the Venerable Acharn was successful in planting the Bodhi-tree [the Tree of Enlightenment] in the minds of a number of his disciples. It is far more difficult and painstaking to plant this inner Bodhi-tree than to plant the real tree itself. A number of these disciples mentioned earlier are: Phra Acharn Singh, Phra Maha Pin, of Ubol Rajadhani; Phra Acharn Thet, the district of Tha Boh in the town of Nong Khai; Phra Acharn Fan of Sakol Nakhorn; Phra Acharn Khao of Wat Tham Klong Pharne, Udorn Thani. Then there are the following who have not as yet been mentioned. Phra Acharn Phrom of Bahn Dong Yen Nong Harn in Udorn Thani, who passed away recently; Phra Acharn Lee of Wat Asokaram in the town of Samud Prakarn [also passed away]; Phra Acharn Chod and Phra Acharn Lui of the town of Loey; Phra Acharn Orn of Nong Bua Bahn; Phra Acharn Sim and Phra Acharn Tue of Chiangmai; Phra Acharn Kongma in Sakol Nakhorn [passed away].

There are, of course, others whom the writer cannot recall at the moment. Each of the above disciples possesses an outstanding character of his own, but all are worthy of high veneration and homage. Some are well-known and have large followings of disciples, whereas others prefer living a solitary life. There are more of the Venerable Acharn's disciples who are 'millionaires' in dharma but who are hardly known since they always prefer to remain in seclusion.

The Venerable Acharn, more than any other Acharn in the Northeast, is thus to be given credit for having successfully planted the Bodhi-tree into the minds of bhikkhus.

The term 'bodhi', when applied to the Buddha, means Enlightenment, but when used to refer to his disciples, it should be understood to mean attainment. To develop the minds of others to attainment is very much like planting a Bodhi-tree in such minds, the difference being that it needs painstaking effort on the part of an Acharn before the minds of any one of his disciples can be trained, developed and progressed steadily towards the final goal of Attainment.

The mind of the worldling is a true champion in inventing excuses to justify itself. The planting of the inner Bodhi-tree is an exacting task for an Acharn, requiring his ceaseless effort and care to nurture its growth. He must himself be beyond the power of defilements in order to impress and delight his disciples, and to willingly get them to submit themselves to discipline and training. In this way their characters will blend with the dharma and will be systematically established in the dharma. Were an Acharn and his disciples to be similarly overpowered by defilements, what hope would there be for one to drag the other along to security? Thus the most difficult thing in the world is perhaps to plant the Bodhi-tree of Attainment into the mind of an ordinary bhikkhu, thereby transforming him into a once-returned, a non-returned, and an arahant, all of whom are worthy of respect, reverence and homage.

Often the growth of such a Bodhi sapling is cut short due to pests, insects, or the ravages

of the elements, only a few being able to survive the hostile environment to grow large enough to depend on its own strength. So clandestine is the destructive influence of pests and harmful insects, and so furious are the ravages of the elements, that a full-grown Bodhi-tree of Attainment is a very rare occurrence.

We plant a tree for its flowers and fruit, and in a matter of years we can reap the expected results, but with growing the Bodhi-tree of Attainment, the patience and time involved are, in many cases, incomparable, for this tree in the mind of worldlings has its own peculiarity - even if there are no pests or harmful elements coining to destroy it, ironically enough, it often takes pains to beckon them for its own poisoning and destruction. Anyone who doubts this truth is invited to 'come and see' the sadistic nature of his mind by taking ordination and following the Vinaya [code of monastic discipline]. Many are there, who, in spite of their shaven heads [and kasaya robes], just cannot help cherishing thoughts that properly belong only to lay disciples. Most of the time they are hungry in their desire for pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches, forgetting the fact that such desires are very harmful and destructive to their own Bodhi-tree of Attainment, which is sure to wither and die through lack of nutrition and constant poisoning.

A bhikkhu's Bodhi-tree must be able to stand firm, its roots thrust deep into the earth, thus making it unshakeable in the wind. Anyone who has had some experience in this matter will know how painful it is to nurture the growth of this Bodhi sapling and to keep it from destructive pests and elements, and also how ironic the mind appears to be, considering its own sadistic tendency for self-poisoning. Such being the case, anyone who is able to safeguard his Bodhi-tree until it is full-grown should be deeply admired and revered. In modern times we have the Venerable Acharn as the most eminent of such persons since he had, through his rigorous and resolute self-training, developed his mind into a full-grown Bodhi-tree, which put forth blossoms and edible fruits, with luxuriant foliage to give cool shade to birds and men. Even though he has passed away, recollecting his life and selfless service to all who approached him with a genuine desire for the dharma, will always give fresh impetus to the practical aspect of Buddhism for all who admire and venerate him.

To the Town of Sakol Nakhorn - His Photographs

The Venerable Acharn stayed two Rains Retreats in the town of Udorn Thani after leaving Chiangmai. He was then invited to the town of Sakol Nakhorn by Khun Mae [Madam] Noom Juvanon, one of his former disciples, and a group of lay devotees there. The Venerable Acharn accepted the invitation and they were overjoyed and arranged for a car to take him there towards the end of BE 2484 (CE 1943).

At Sakol Nakhorn, he stayed at Wat Suddhavas, where he was regularly approached for instruction by lay devotees, bhikkhus and samaneras. It was here that he was requested to have his photograph taken for the benefit of posterity and for those not able to come and see him. There were two other places where he received similar requests for similar reasons: the town of Nakhorn Rajasima and the village of Farnng Dang, in the district of Phanom, the town of Nakhorn Phanom, where he stayed after returning from the funeral ceremony of his former meditation master, the Venerable Phra Acharn Sao. It is through these photographs taken on three separate occasions that we are able to know what he looked like. It was, however, not without the apprehension and embarrassment of the photographers before the request was made. Several times, and for many unhappy

minutes, the photographers were known to have changed his sitting posture, walking nervously back and forth from the Venerable Acharn to the camera until they were drenched with perspiration. He did not always give his permission for such changes to be made and the photographers might have been reprimanded for it, which was the cause of their nervous and palpitating fear.

Great Boxers But Poor Talkers - Right Exertion

Having first stayed at Wat Suddhavas [within the populous town area itself] for some time, he proceeded to move to the forest hermitage at the village of Namone, which was more secluded, being away from the heavily populated area. The bhikkhus and samaneras under his training and guidance there were all highly impressive, all being devoted to the dharma with Attainment as their goal. In other words, they were all 'great boxers but poor talkers') being keen in exertion rather than in conversation.

Each of his bhikkhu and samanera disciples was engaged in exertion, either in his own humble shelter or on his walking track. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, they could be seen coming from their own shelters to sweep the monastery or hermitage area, after which they would fill the water-jars with water for drinking, bathing and for other purposes. At all times they were self-controlled, with mindfulness-and-wisdom always present in whatever they were doing at the moment. They were never engaged in idle or childish conversation. After this joint duty, they would then retire to their own places for more exertion, the open area [for general use], which had just been swept clean, looking like a deserted clearing in the middle of the forest. They would never be seen passing the time in idle talk anywhere.

Within or around each bhikkhu's shelter, one would find him busy with either his sitting meditation or walking meditation. Only during the time set aside for instruction in the evening or for having a meal in the morning would they come together in the hall set aside for such a purpose. They would not allow themselves to be divorced from mindfulness-and-wisdom even while going out for alms-food and having a meal together, never looking this way and that, or chatting with each other.

Before eating, they would stop to contemplate the nature of the food mixed within their alms-bowls and the purpose for eating it, trying not to be overcome by desire or aversion. While eating, self-restraint was always exercised. There was absolutely no frivolous looking about or idle chatter. In chewing, care was taken not to make any noise which would cause annoyance to others. After eating, the place was wiped and cleaned, alms-bowls were washed and then dried for a few moments in the sun before being returned to their proper places. They then retired to the seclusion of their own shelters and resumed their exertions, each in the way he preferred.

No one worried about the time spent in exertion, be it morning, afternoon, or night. Their purpose was to make the mind dwell on the passage chosen for recitation or the theme of meditation or the activity of contemplation supported by the repeated instructions of wisdom. This was so that the mind could at least be safely maintained at that particular level or, better still, be developed steadily towards higher Attainment. During the moments of exertion, the indispensable factor is mindfulness, whereas wisdom is to be used when contemplation is required. Exertion, therefore, is basically supported by mindfulness, without which it cannot properly be called exertion. For instance, walking or sitting without the control of mindfulness becomes robot-like and cannot justifiably be

termed Right Exertion as an element of the Noble Eightfold Path. Hence the emphasis on the importance of mindfulness in the Venerable Acharn's instructions.

Mindfulness is to be developed to control every moment and movement of exertion, until it finally becomes mahasati [great-mindfulness] which then produces mahapannya [great-wisdom]. It should be noted that in the early stages, when peace is required, mindfulness is imperative. Later, wisdom must come as the complimentary factor until the point of finality is reached.

The Venerable Acharn's mode of practice was bold, rigorous and resolute, and he taught his disciples to do likewise. Anyone less dedicated and resolute was unable to stand this strong and manly practice.

Every six or seven days there would be a meeting for dharma instruction. During the rest of the time, bhikkhus and samaneras were allowed to put forth their utmost effort in their own shelters, but anyone faced with an obstacle or problem could approach him at any time for his advice. The atmosphere in his presence was wonderfully pervaded with the dharma. Path, Fruition and Nirvana appeared to be within easy reach of everyone. They were all bathed in the warmth of his spiritual rays which radiated an invigorating effect on those who accepted his system of practice. Each disciple was therefore an encouraging example to others in striving for the common goal. Under such circumstances, all were similarly dedicated, and in their persistent efforts, they thought little of the differences between day and night.

On moonlit nights they could be seen engaged in walking meditation on the tracks by the side of their shelters, whereas on dark nights the lanterns used to illuminate the tracks were all there were to be seen. The Venerable Acharn himself was always exemplary in this aspect of practice.

For several hours every night, the Venerable Acharn recited passages from the Scriptures. Among those which he regularly recited were such long discourses as *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* and the *Mahasamaya Sutta*. On some occasions he would translate these suttas for his disciples, but his translations would be adapted according to their practical aspects rather than being based upon etymological meanings. They were therefore easy to understand and created vivid pictures in the minds of his listeners. Many could not help but be surprised at his capacity and ability for translation, knowing that he did not have much academic training. He appeared better able to translate the Pali passages than scholars with the highest level of academic training. He was able to translate in an instant whatever passage was quoted from the Scriptures each time in order to support his instructions. Besides the rapidity of translation, his tone revealed the courage and unshaken confidence which comes from firsthand experience of the meanings conveyed in each word. For instance, the passage *vata rukkha na pabbato* was vividly translated as 'the wind may blow down trees, breaking them into splinters, yet such a wind cannot even shake a mountain of rock'. It is possible that both the quotation and its translation emerged simultaneously from within through his insight rather than being the product of mere memory, crammed full of external book-knowledge.

Teaching Through Realization, Not Speculation

Having dwelt in the village of Namone for a period of time, the Venerable Acharn then

moved on to the village of Bahn Koke, about two kilometers away. This place was about one kilometer from the nearest village. At both these places there was a small number of disciples staying with him, about ten or eleven in all. This was quite suitable to the number of dwelling places, which were not so many.

It was in the village of Bahn Koke that the writer was first admitted to stay under his guidance and training. Thus, the incidents which took place from this time onwards and which are related here were events which the writer witnessed himself. All the events occurring before this time the writer had to gather from other disciples in various places, sometimes taking notes and at other times recording their narratives. This gathering of information took the writer a number of years, after which time it all had to be arranged in chronological order, which still cannot be said to be perfect. However, since the following accounts are the writer's direct experiences, they reflect personal viewpoints for which the writer takes full responsibility.

The Venerable Acharn stayed for the period of the Rains Retreat at the village of Bahn Koke peacefully and happily. His instruction, held once every six or seven days, each time lasted at least two hours, sometimes up to three or four, but his listeners, whose minds were absorbed in his dharma-teaching, experienced no stiffness of body or fatigue. He himself appeared to be delighted in giving his instructions to his disciples. Each time he gave a detailed and profound explanation of the dharma which he himself had experienced and realized, to the delight of his listeners whose aim was that self-same realization. There was no doubt on the part of his listeners as to his attainment. Doubts, if any, were regarding their own capabilities - how much would they be able to develop themselves in following him?

While listening to his teachings, one could not help but recall the incidents that took place twenty-six centuries earlier when the Buddha himself was delivering his teachings to his bhikkhu disciples. It was evident how the Venerable Acharn had, in the same manner, given them the invaluable treasures of his own realization: the Path, Fruition and Nirvana. There was nothing less than this and nothing other than this, and that was why the Buddha's listeners' minds were successfully developed to the same level from the day of the First Sermon to that of his Complete Passing Away. Now that the Buddha, who was the Teacher, had been Enlightened to the Absolute Purity of the dharma and had pondered that dharma with all its wonders [Path, Fruition and Nirvana], there was no doubt that his listeners were enabled to realize the Path, Fruition and Nirvana as a result. Similarly, the Venerable Acharn was delivering the dharma which was to him the Absolute Present, thus revealing his realization and attainment without a grain of speculation which would have caused doubt and hesitation instead of Insight. This kind of dharma is therefore at all times encouraging as well as enlightening to those who listen to it.

On nights when there were no meetings for instruction, after leaving the track for walking-meditation about eight o'clock, he could be heard softly reciting passages from Scripture at his sheltering place. This would last quite some time before he would begin his sitting meditation, which he continued until it was time to rest. On the nights when there were meetings he would again be heard reciting the passages in the same manner, and he would put off his time for rest until midnight or one o'clock.

There was one time when the writer was overcome by childish curiosity in wanting to know what passages he recited for so long. The writer stealthily approached the Venerable Acharn's place but he abruptly stopped. Very astonished, the writer backed

away and then stopped for a moment. A few minutes later the Venerable Acharn began his recitation as usual. Again being overcome by this naughty desire, the writer softly moved forward, listening attentively to what it was he was reciting. The Venerable Acharn again stopped! It was as if he knew that there was a naughty 'thief' nearby. This was enough and it was time this childish curiosity be stopped. The writer was tortured all night by a guilty conscience and could hardly look at the Venerable Acharn next morning. The Venerable Acharn also seemed to look at the writer with a frightening stare. Surely he must have known about that naughty desire much the same way as he had known of all the other thoughts of his disciples. One more such intrusion would certainly have brought 'thunderbolts' down on the writer's head'.

The First Day with the Venerable Acharn

It was in the afternoon when the writer first arrived, being both fearful and worried. Incidentally, I laid down to rest and fell asleep. Then he came to welcome me.

'Why are you lying here like a pig?' he said. 'This, is not a pigsty. I do not raise pigs here, nor is this a place where pigs are kept.'

His voice was so loud and strong and the gestures he made so threatening that I was quite literally scared out of my wits. I was very much afraid of him and had had to bolster all my courage just to come to his place because of my desire to practice under his guidance and training. Now that fear was aggravated all the more by his tirade against pigs with which he had welcomed me. Quite frightened and badly shaken, I stepped out and looked around and soon breathed a sigh of relief, for on seeing no one I realized that it was but a dream. When I later related this incident to him, he kindly consoled me for having been so frightened, saying that I must have been overwhelmed by anxiety and fear since it was the first time I had come to see him. That, he said, would have been the cause of such a horrible dream in which I had been warned against living like a pig while trying to lead the life of a bhikkhu.

Most people, not realizing how worthy a human being is, are given to acting more on impulse than on reason, little thinking of decency or morality. They are not worthy of being called human in the real sense of the term. Hence a Thai saying to the effect that such a person does not measure a full baht's [a Thai coin] weight. What he lacks is that which can check his impulses. It is a pity that because of this lack, man has deplorably descended far below his station and has thereby lost his intrinsic being as a human. What is left is only the remains of a physical body which has been rotting inside.

'It is in cases such as yours, those who can still be reminded, that such visions appear,' he said. 'You should be glad, then, and regard it as a valuable lesson. Whenever you are again overcome by laziness, you should remember this lesson and conquer it. I like this vision, which is very rare and can well serve as a reminder against heedlessness or overconfidence. It is also an incentive towards exertion which leads to tranquillity. If you can properly make use of this vision, you may be able to achieve your goal sooner than the others who came here before you. It is a good vision, not a bad one.'

'While staying with a teacher, you should not trouble yourself with too much worry and fear. His teachings and warnings are based on dharma or righteousness. It's no use being afraid of him without reason. What one should be afraid of is evil and its consequent suffering, not the teacher's scolding. It is never my purpose or enjoyment to scold or

criticize others without reason. My self-training is based on the method the Buddha had prescribed. The training of my disciples also follows this same way. To side-step from that path would be wrong and benefit no one.

'You are invited to stay here without fear, but exerting yourself to the best of your ability. Do not be discouraged by anything. Dharma is universal, belonging to everyone who seeks after and who strives for it. The Buddha never monopolized it for any group in particular. All have an equal right to possess it. Always remind yourself of this valuable lesson so that you may be able to stay away from the pig's character. The Path, Fruition and Nirvana will then be nearer, and sooner or later, so will the Cessation of Suffering. I really appreciate your good intention. My way is a harsh way, but then more wisdom and strength of will were gained from it. I subjected myself to this method and now I subject my disciples to this same method.'

His Resourcefulness in Teaching

The Venerable Acharn consoled the writer as though he were a child, with a view to encourage him along the Path and to prevent him from making friends with a pig. It showed how resourceful he was in his personal treatment of his disciples. Later, on another occasion, when I approached him, being at that time frustrated by fluctuating progress, he asked how well I had been progressing. Whenever I replied that I was making steady progress, he would add that this was good and say that I should intensify my efforts so as to achieve the Cessation of Suffering in a short time. However, whenever I replied that things were not going so well and that the mind was deteriorating, he would console me, telling me encouragingly that it was no use worrying about such a fluctuation, that in a case such as this effort was to be intensified.

'The developed mind cannot go so far,' he said. 'It cannot escape you and will soon come back, like a dog following its master. With your efforts intensified, it is sure to come back to you. The more wildly you run after it, the more peevishly it will run away from you. Keep calm and be detached. Recite *bud-bho* constantly and persistently. It will come back by itself.

'Do not abandon *bud-dho*, for having no other food to sustain its life elsewhere, the mind will stay with you always. This *bud-dho* will serve as food for its sustenance. Having had its fill, it will rest. Now you can relax while it is asleep and has ceased its running about seeking fires to consume you. You should continue in this manner until the mind prefers staying with you and does not play truant again. Then your mind will no more deteriorate since its nutrition, *bud-dho*, or whatever other meditation subject you use, is enough to sustain it. Try to do what I tell you and you will no longer suffer from fluctuating progress again.'

His Advice, Warning and Encouragement Always Individual

After the Rains Retreat, the Venerable Acharn went back to the village of Namone where he had spent the former Retreat. Later he moved to the village of Bahn Huey Khan deep in the forest, and then to a deserted monastery on the hillside at the village of Nasinuan, for several months. Here he was stricken with fever for several days until he cured it, as usual, by the therapeutic effect of the dharma.

In April, BE 2485 (CE 1942), he went to the town of Ubol Rajathani to attend the funeral rites of his former meditation-master Phra Acharn Sao. He then returned to the village of Namone to spend another Rains Retreat there.

It was during this year that the Venerable Acharn trained his disciples more arduously, making use of all possible means for their advancement instructing, warning, urging, reprimanding, reprobating, all for their own benefit. During the Rains Retreat there were meetings once every four nights. The result was that many disciples were able to advance satisfactorily and related to him their individual experiences, which the writer had the opportunity to listen to, although regarding my own practice at that time, there was nothing worth telling him about as in the case of the others.

It was also during this Rains Retreat that the writer had an experience which I can clearly remember to this day. The Venerable Acham began to handle me with complete seriousness and rigidity. He was no longer clement or tolerant as before. Perhaps he felt that I now deserved this kind of treatment after a period of 'gentle' discipline. He did this for my own good as he had done for the sake of so many others. All of his other bhikkhu disciples were also enthusiastic in their exertions, and told him many wonderful experiences, before, during and after the instruction time. They sought his advice to improve or rectify themselves. They were never disappointed, for he always provided them with what they hoped for and needed, to the delight of both his questioners and listeners. His advice, encouragement and warnings were always individual in character. Thus there was no end to the joy and excitement of his listeners, who looked forward to hearing more and more of such experiences, even if it was only for their own self-encouragement.

Sometimes the Venerable Acharn would recall experiences of his former lives for his disciples, whereas at other times he would tell them of the early stages of his exertions in this life, which included the phenomena and insights resulting from meditation and contemplation, the spiritual struggle from the mire of the senses and suppositions, and then the critical moment when achievement was about to be won and he to leave the quagmire forever. This was the climax of a story that did not fail to hold his listeners spellbound, and at the same time, force them to consider themselves and lead them to wonder when they would be able to do the same thing. Sometimes his listeners could not help being depressed while thinking of their own development, or rather underdevelopment, at that time. But there was something good to be gotten from this: it gave them fresh courage and urged them to more dedicated effort towards that same goal. His stories, therefore, always invigorated his listeners and enabled them to endure whatever hardships came their way.

Immeasurable Benefits of Being Influenced by the Wise and Virtuous

It is imperative to associate with wise and virtuous men. This fact was evident to all his disciples who had been under his training and guidance for at least some period of time, and who had thereby been bathed in the radiance of his loving-kindness and wisdom. They were gradually moulded by his instructions and exemplary virtues and unconsciously transformed into the likeness of his character. Such a transformation would not, of course, be complete in all respects, but his inspirational influence was sure to be felt to

a greater or lesser degree, depending upon the capacity to absorb of each individual. At the least they would bear the unmistakable traces of his tradition, mode of practice and system of thought. Such a change is no less true in associating with evil persons, who are similarly able to transform anyone associating with them into their likeness.

This, however, refers only to the source of external evil. There is also another source of evil, less obvious, but more powerful. This is embedded within the character of everyone, including so-called 'cultured people' and many bhikkhus and samaneras, who have declared themselves to be the Tathagata's followers. This source of evil means delusion, the ignorance of the whispers of the 'magician', who urges one to unknowingly fall into evil ways. But there are times when the individual knows full well that an evil voice is drumming an evil idea into his head, but he consoles himself, thinking that such an idea is still harmless since it hasn't manifested itself in words and deeds. This is forgetting the truth that evil, whenever it occurs and wherever it stays, is always evil. It begins to produce an evil effect even while it is still in the mind in the form of thoughts.

The purpose of the Buddha's doctrine is thus to eradicate all evils from the mind so that they will never again overpower the mind with their sinister influences. Evidence of this may be seen in the Buddha and his arahant disciples, including the Venerable Acharn Mun Bhuridatto, who purged their minds completely of all defilements. This is the writer's sincere belief. Any criticism should therefore be directed against the writer and not against the Venerable Acharn, who is well-gone and absolutely freed from all bondage.

The Forest Hermitage of Nong Phue Center of Dhutanga Bhikkhus

The Venerable Acharn spent three Rains Retreats in the area around the villages of Huey Khan, Nasinuan, and Bahn Koke in the district of Tong Khobe, the town of Sakol Nakhorn. There were regular periods of instruction for the people and celestial beings, but the latter did not come as often as when he was in Chiangmai, possibly because the place was nearer to the town than where he had stayed in Chiangmai. It was only, on significant days such as Magha, Vesakha, the Rains Retreat, First Day, Middle Day, and Last Day [Pavarana] that they would regularly come to see him. The number of bhikkhus and samaneras staying with him was also not many, owing to the limited number of dwelling places. There were at all times, however, many who came to visit him for a short time for his instructions and who would then depart for their own places. They were kindly given whatever instruction and advice they wanted.

The Venerable Acharn was invited by the devotees of the village of Nong Phue Nanai to 'uplift their spirit' [a Thai expression] by his staying there with them. He accepted their invitation and soon they came together to welcome him to their village of Nong Phue, in the sub-district of Nanai, the district of Phannanikhom, the town of Sakol Nakhorn. He set out from the village of Bahn Koke on foot, walking along the winding track and spending about three or four nights in the forest before reaching the village of Nong Phue.

A few days after reaching the village of Nong Phue, the Venerable Acharn was stricken with malaria and was afflicted with its intermittent effects of fever for months. Malaria was at that time chronic, affecting a person's health for years. Its symptoms of fever might not appear for weeks or months, but would then abruptly return. Its worst effect was that its victims were forced into the position of being consumers rather than

producers. They would be able to eat and rest, but not work. They would also be inclined towards complaining, and in many cases, become impossible, there being no way to please them or stop their ceaseless complaining. Such people were thus a burden to everyone, and, in most cases when the malaria became chronic, the patients' complexion turned pale and their bellies bulged, especially in children. Those living in towns or in open spaces were more susceptible to malaria than those born and bred in the forested areas. The dhutanga bhikkhus, in the course of their wanderings through the forests, were no exception, being in many cases more sensitive. The writer himself was also stricken with malaria from the very first Rains Retreat there until the summer of the following year.

But despite all this, instead of being frightened and discouraged, more and more bhikkhus and samaneras took pains to journey to find him. Within the monastery itself during the period of the Rains Retreat there were from twenty to thirty of them. More stayed in the nearby villages, two or three in some places, five or six in others, and nine or ten in still others. On Wan Phra days [full moon, half moon and new moon days], there would be twenty to thirty bhikkhus coming to listen to the Patimokka [recitation of the Monastic Discipline once a fortnight], and more when bhikkhus in nearby monasteries came together for the above purpose. Outside the period of the Rains Retreat, as long as the Venerable Acharn stayed there, their numbers would sometimes reach fifty or sixty or even more than that. During the day all the bhikkhus and samaneras would retire to their secluded places outside the monastery area and exert themselves in meditation.

The forest around there was scores of kilometres in width, and in length it stretched to an immeasurable distance, flanked by a chain of mountains as far as the eye could see. South of the district of Phannanikhom it was all forest and mountains down to the town of Kalasin. The district of Nong Phue, where the Venerable Acharn was staying at that time, thus became the center of dhutanga bhikkhus whose sole aim was Attainment through mind-development. They were willing to travel great distances through the forests just to see the Venerable Acharn and to listen to his instruction on Patimokkha days and on other occasions, when their problems could be solved and their doubts cleared up by his advice.

After the period of the Rains Retreat, in the dry season, there were abundant places for seclusion in the mountains, caves and precipices, or even under the trees in the forest. Whatever small villages there were were spaced out great distances apart, some consisting of ten houses while others had twenty or thirty. There were also villages on the hillsides scattered in the region, each consisting of five or six houses. It was these villagers who generously supported the dhutanga bhikkhus with daily alms-food.

The Forest Hermitage

The village of Nong Phue is situated in the middle of a valley surrounded by forests and mountains. The valley itself is fairly wide with table-land suitable for farming in various places. The mountains are numerous and the forests vast, all offering great areas for seclusion. Hence the great number of dhutanga bhikkhus all year round, in both the rainy and the dry seasons.

While the Venerable Acharn was staying there, dhutanga bhikkhus were constantly visiting him, some coming down from the mountains to receive instructions and to ask for the solutions to problems, whereas others were returning up the mountains on their way

back after having received his instruction, being advised or encouraged by him. Still others came from the sub-districts and the districts of that town. There were even those from the nearby towns and from other towns in that region.

In the dry season many people, lay disciples as well as bhikkhus, businessmen and government officials, thronged to the forest hermitage to see him for his instructions. They all had to travel on foot, except those old people and women who were not used to walking and who travelled by bullock cart [which took almost as much time as walking].

From the district of Nong Phue there was a direct path to the hermitage which was about twenty kilometres long. By a longer path winding at the foot of the mountain it would have been about twenty-five kilometers. The direct path, although shorter, was more difficult since it went directly up the mountain slope and there was no place to stop for a rest, whereas by taking the longer path, there were villages along the way, which, although not so comfortable, afforded a resting place. Roads which could be used by cars only existed between towns proper, and the number of cars running between them were few. Those missing any transportation of this type in most cases had to wait another day.

Walking - A Kind of Exertion

All the dhutanga bhikkhus who went to see the Venerable Acharn, however, went on foot. They considered walking to be a kind of exertion and a better opportunity for breathing fresh air, which was far better than sitting in a crowded car or bus.

With the place they wanted to reach in mind, they would just set out, heading in that general direction, walking leisurely and caring nothing about when they would reach there. When it was dark, they were able to stop and rest anywhere. Next morning, they would set out-again if there was no village nearby for alms-food. They were also satisfied with any kind and any amount of food, delicious or otherwise, little or much. Their purpose was to sustain the life of the body, if possible, for another day [if not possible, it would again be all right]. They would continue their journeying in this manner until their destination was reached where they would select a secluded place suited to themselves and their mode of practice.

Water was a very important thing that could not be overlooked, the supply of which should not be too far away. Having found a suitable place, a dhutanga bhikkhu would begin his exertion, alternating walking meditation with sitting meditation, day and night. Mindfulness was then to be strenuously cultivated as a safeguard against undesirable moods. This was also supported by wisdom or contemplation directed towards whatever contact there was with environment or phenomena.

The mind would be established on a firm foundation of any topic of meditation agreeable to that bhikkhu's tendencies or character, withdrawing into the state of one-pointedness. Having emerged from that state, the mind would resume its contemplation through the power of wisdom [pannya]. Objects for contemplation were of two categories: the external and the internal. External objects referred to objects coming through the various sense organs [eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body], whereas internal objects referred to the nature and functions of the body, and also the ripples of the mind, all of which are in continuous motion. This is the manifestation of changeability, being always stirred up and restless.

The nature of the body and the mind is contemplated on the basis of changeability until a degree of detachment can be obtained in proportion to that of wisdom, which ceaselessly unearths both the rootlets and the main root of defilements. This is an absorbing and delightful task when contemplation is directed uninterruptedly towards whatever phenomena are taking place externally or internally. All of them can be digested or boiled down to the three signs of being: changeability, flux and ownerlessness.

However, there were occasions when doubts occurred and progress blocked. The bhikkhu would then come to see the Venerable Acharn and relate to him his doubts and difficulties. Having been given the instruction and advice needed, he would return to his place of seclusion and resume his efforts. This was how and why dhutanga bhikkhus gathered around the Venerable Acharn during that time.

Usually one bhikkhu would stay alone, or sometimes two of them would stay together, in a secluded place in the forests. One place would sometimes be six or seven kilometres from another, at other times eight to twelve kilometers, and others sometimes fifteen, sixteen, twenty or even thirty kilometers away. Those who were staying that far away would have to stay overnight at the Venerable Acharn's place whenever they came to seem to see him for his instructions, it being the following morning when they would be able to journey back to their remote places.

The pathways from one village to another in the forests were not like those joining districts or towns. They were merely trails used by the people of that region, winding deep into the forests and around or up mountains. In many places there were ramifications, one or some of which, if taken, would lead the unwary traveller away from a nearby village, taking him deeper and deeper into the forest. Even along the right track, one village was sometimes twenty or thirty kilometres away from the next. Special care had to be taken while taking such a long and lonely trail. Otherwise, the traveller who lost his way would have to spend a night in the middle of the forest or find himself starving there. Only a hunter who had sometimes been off the beaten track would be able to save that lost traveller and bring him to the safety of a nearby village.

Such were the ordeals challenging the dhutanga bhikkhus' steadfastness of aim and their devotion to their ideal. There were hardships and inconveniences in everything-in eating, sleeping, making effort, travelling and seeking a competent meditation master for his advice and instruction. On meeting him, they would be overjoyed, like children seeing their parents. They based all their hopes for Attainment on him and attached all their love, faith, respect and reverence to him. In other words, he was the focus of their devotion. They offered him their bodies, minds, lives, everything.

Even as separated as they were by the distances between their individual places, yet there was always a strong mental link between them and their meditation master. Such being the case, they did not mind the distances, hardships and dangers as long as they were able to enjoy the warmth of his person, his instruction, advice and protective power. Since realization of the dharma was their sole aim, inconveniences in eating, sleeping and other aspects of living meant nothing to them. There were times when they were soaked to the skin all night because of rain, all the time trembling like leaves with the cold. Yet these and other conditions were tolerable if they were bathed in the radiance of a competent meditation master they whole-heartedly revered. If one listened to their discussions, it would have seemed that they were like the wild beasts,

unprotected and uncared for, enduring hardships alone in the depths of the forest. Often their shelters and sleeping places were no better than those of the animals, since that was the best they could find.

There were a variety of practices for self-discipline which they undertook and which included: not sleeping; reducing food intake or eating no food at all for a length of time appropriate to the endurance of the body; all night walking or sitting meditation; sitting meditation in a dangerous place, such as the mouth of a cave where a tiger was dwelling, on a tiger's pathway, in a cemetery where corpses are newly buried or burnt, or even at the edge of a high precipice. In all these instances, the purpose was the same: to tame the unruly mind by forcing it to face whatever it was afraid of, and in most cases they would be able to succeed by such means when it was suitable to their character, which deserved being treated that way. The Venerable Acharn had done this to himself and that was why he advised his disciples to do the same, which practices they have adopted for themselves and their disciples to this day.

Results Justify All Patience and Sacrifices

Such methods of practice are naturally very much against the habits of many people. But this is to be expected and is, therefore, unavoidable in a system of self-betterment or that of unearthing the invaluable treasure within oneself. In view of the results to be obtained in the form of bliss and security, the hardships and sufferings involved are worth all patience and sacrifice. This is true in secular as well as religious circles. The task of safeguarding a person or thing from evil or danger must require courage as well as the power of endurance. It is only in the case of a dead man [or a discarded thing] that there is no longer any need to maintain or safeguard it. The endurance and self-denial of the dhutanga bhikkhus who brave all these sufferings for the sake of self-ennoblement is to be highly appreciated.

Dharma Never Irrelevant, Impracticable or Outdated

As long as the dharma is followed, so long will Buddhism remain and the results of dharma-practice reveal themselves to the world to the extent that it is put into practice. Buddhism is based on the truth which the Buddha, through his practice and realization, proclaimed. It is safeguarded and maintained by his disciples, who, through the same truthfulness, have fulfilled the causes and reaped the same effects. The truths of Buddhism can be proclaimed to the Three Worlds without fear of them being protested against as being false. Dharma is by its very nature truth. The Buddha is that one who has realized this truth by himself through his own efforts before proclaiming it to others. If there is ever any truth which has not yet been realized or attained to by anyone, it is due to his own fault or deficiency somewhere in his own mind, which is still clouded over inside. It is never the fault or deficiency of the Buddha-Dharma. It is due to the disciples' own shortcomings that, in the eyes of others, the truth seems to be untrue and the dharma irrelevant, impracticable and outdated.

Preparation for the Unavoidable

Let us return for a moment to the methods of self-restraint practiced by the dhutanga bhikkhus. As earlier explained, such 'strong' practices as all night sitting meditation, reducing food intake or not eating at all for a tolerable length of time, going into a cemetery or even a tiger's den, are meant to train and tame the unruly mind, to draw it back within itself instead of allowing it to dwell upon whatever is feared which is external, to confirm and convince it of its own power, and to develop the qualities of courage, poise and peace. This is, in a sense, a rehearsal or preparation for the actual moment of an emergency, when the body is to experience excruciating pain or is threatened by death. With sufficient preparation, the mind that has been tamed and trained can hold its own and become detached from the condition of the body. It is only through such tests that strength of will and wisdom are developed and latent capabilities revealed and made use of to the full. When applied properly, in accordance with an aspirant's tendencies and powers of endurance, such strong practices effectively serve to awaken the dormant qualities and powers of an aspirant and equip him with detachment and peace of mind in any and all circumstances, however frightening. As a result, an aspirant who had been afraid of ghosts is no longer afraid of them; one who had been easily frightened by tigers or any wild beasts is no longer bogged down by his own fear.

Food Restraint

As far as food is concerned, this method of self-training is rather complicated and is a long-range one. An aspirant who knows that his mind is very unruly with regard to food and who is always overcome by its taste, will reduce the amount of food intake per day, or sometimes go without food for a day or two, to the extent that the body is able to stand such a practice. Most people are usually overcome by both desire for food they like and by aversion to the food they dislike. The more they can eat what they like, the better they think it is. They take delight in nourishing the body at the expense of the mind. This cannot be done by a dhutanga bhikkhu, who concentrates on mind-development. He tries to subjugate that oppressive desire in order to make known to it who the boss is.

Knowing that his mind is still disobedient in this respect, he courageously subjects himself to an unsympathizing discipline. When offered food that he likes, he stops to scrutinize the condition of his own mind first. If it is enslaved by desire and shows uncontrollable delight in it, he refuses that kind of food and accepts that which the mind refuses. When the mind struggles impatiently for more, he gives it less. When the mind craves for the tastes of all the other foods placed in front of him, he satisfies it with plain rice, and nothing more. Some kinds of food are pleasant to the taste or beneficial to the health of the body, but which can become disagreeable to the health of the mind. This kind of food is also to be avoided. Accepting it may strengthen the body, but it will become an obstacle to developing meditation. In this case, the development of meditation must come first. This is following in the footsteps of one's Acharya, ridding oneself of the habitual practice of striving after as pleasant food as possible and eating as much as possible.

In other aspects of the practice, he trains himself to sleep and wake up at a fixed time, never to indulge in sleeping. Great care is also taken in going out of the monastery or hermitage area. On some occasions it may not be against the monastic rules, but if it is likely to lead him to evil influences, he also avoids going there. These, and others, are instances of nourishing and cultivating the dharma in the mind of an aspirant - a task far more difficult than developing all other kinds of habits and abilities.

Feeding the Defilements - Merely a Symbol is Not Enough

In secular matters, the development of desirable qualities is always feeding the defilements, the resulting feedback being only to the detriment of the developer himself. A split second without self-control is enough for the defilements to enter and merge with the mind. So easy is the birth of defilements but so difficult is their death. What is worse, we are inclined to succumb to them with delight! And thus we encourage their growth and development. That is why the defilements become emboldened, being fearless everywhere, except in the minds of those who harbour dharma as a neutralizing force, and especially in the minds of the Buddha and his arahant disciples. Within such minds there is absolutely no room for the defilements' magician-like performances.

Within the minds of the dhutanga bhikkhus, who are struggling hard, there is a fierce battle raging--- and there is no telling which side will be victorious. The kasaya robes he dons are in fact the banner of those who have achieved the final and decisive victory over the defilements, but a mere banner is not enough to frighten the defilements away. On the contrary, the defilements seem to disturb the dhutanga bhikkhu all the more, regardless even of his age. That is why he has to counteract their powers with the same ferocity. General tactics are applied; special ones are invented and adapted to individual instances. Inconveniences and hardships are endured and challenges accepted. Without such a dedicated struggle, he is sure to be made a fool of by the defilements. He would then bring disgrace on himself and become a debasing example to all who have looked up to him as their model and guide. Only through a dedicated fight to the finish, irrespective of the life that might be lost in the struggle, can victory be won, the symbolic value of the kasaya robes ascertained, and the validity of the Buddha-Dharma made manifest to the world. Such is how the dhutanga bhikkhus repeatedly warn and instruct themselves in fighting their way towards Deliverance. This is the Noble Path proclaimed by the Buddha, the only haven and protective armour amidst the ravages of the defilements which always threaten and beguile the pilgrims into side-stepping that Path.

The Venerable Acharn himself was no exception. During the days of his relentless struggle he had to face all his ordeals, giving no thought to life or death. His cemetery or charnel-ground could have been anywhere and everywhere but his struggles never ceased. For the sake of the dharma he braved all the storms before he survived them and offered to his disciples the dharma which he had so painstakingly won. In the course of his teaching, he would offer strong and manly methods to rouse his disciples to action and to urge them to be similarly fearless in their Quest. His instructions were always encouraging and enlightening, strengthening their faith and awakening them to the guiles of the defilements which have ruled over the minds of worldlings for so long. This was revealing defilements' tricks and removing their influences from the mind once and for all. Without such a removal, the change of forms or realms of existence would bring about no change in the power of the defilements on the mind, and consequently no change in the suffering to be experienced. The oppressive power of the defilements is always present, and each transition from one plane to another is like changing places within the same great prison. There is always danger lurking, waiting to jump in ambush on the wayfarer through the various realms.

The Challenge of Dharma

His instructions on Patimokkha days and other days, however, were different in nature. On Patimokkha days there would be about forty to fifty bhikkhus from other monasteries, and the instructions given were usually strong and stirring, whereas on private meeting days with his close disciples who were dwelling in the same area, his instructions, besides being strong, were more profound in nature, and more extensive as well. During such an instruction, his disciples would be held spellbound, completely oblivious to the passage of time and outside influences. It seemed as if all defilements had been extinguished while consciousness of time ceased. The minds of the dhutanga bhikkhus at that moment merged totally with the dharma of his instruction, with blissful and wonderful impressions beyond measure, and, for days after that, its profound effects would still be nurtured in their minds. The challenge of his dharma was so powerful that it took his listeners' defilements quite some time before beginning to gradually rear their heads again. Then at the next meeting, defilements would again be forced to beat a hasty retreat.

How A Master Helps His Disciples

This is why dhutanga bhikkhus, with the Cessation of Suffering as their Goal, are attracted to their Acharn, perhaps to an unusual extent in the eyes of others. It is evident that the task of eradicating the defilements is relative - to be done mainly by oneself, of course, but also being substantially helped by the Acharn's guidance, advice, warnings and encouragement. At times, the dhutanga bhikkhus who stayed in remote, secluded areas, had to journey back to see the Venerable Acharn whenever they were faced with problems they could not solve themselves. Having related their difficulties to him, they would be given the explanations and instructions whereby their problems would be immediately resolved. At other times they proceeded down blind alleys of development, beyond which they could go no further. Again his explanations would force the way open and enable them to progress far beyond that point.

The level of individual development in circles of dhutanga bhikkhus is known amongst themselves and between the Acharn and his disciples, thus bringing about both respect and encouragement. Part of this is known through conversation between friends on the practical aspects of dharma, when they relate their experiences to each other. A disciple can also know the level of development of his Acharn when he relates his inner experiences and happenings to his Acharn for advice and explanation, or when he asks his Acharn to help him over obstacles which block his progress. The Acharn who has passed beyond that point will be able to clear up the disciple's doubts and point out to him where and how to surmount that barrier. But there are also times when a disciple is self deluded and hypnotizes himself into thinking that he has already reached his final Attainment. A competent Acharn will be able to know this. He will then correct his disciple's false assumption, explaining to him how and why it is not so, and pointing out that higher practice which the disciple must follow in its entirety before he can rest satisfied. Having known about each other's level of attainment, there was no need for any outer confirmation. The truth was evident to both and was self-proven.

There is, however, another means by which to know of another's degree of attainment. This is through the powers of inward insight, which is more profound than can be dealt with here. The writer is not yet an expert in this respect and would like to leave this aspect of insight to one more experienced.

As far as the Venerable Acharn is concerned, it is not an exaggeration to say that his disciples had complete faith and reverence in him. Having stayed with him for a long

time and followed his instruction and mode of practice thoroughly, they never had any doubt as to his attainment and were willing to follow him completely with their bodies and minds. This is far different from merely believing in rumor or hearsay. The writer used to be elated with pride and argue with the Venerable Acharn in a childish manner, using foolish reasoning and forgetting the original purpose of having gone to stay with him: to practice his teaching and training, and not to teach and train him. After a time, however, it became evident that the writer's reason and logic had fallen flat before that of the Venerable Acharn and what remained was the corpse of his own foolishness. This took place time and again, and every time more corpses were added to the charnel-ground of stupidity. Of course, the Venerable Acharn knew how the writer had been overcome by foolish pride, but he was kind enough not to administer drastic treatment. Often he would smile, perhaps out of pity for the writer's self-delusion. However, there were advantages gained from these stubborn arguments on the part of the writer and the Venerable Acharn's amused tolerance. This was that many valuable lessons were obtained which have been applied in self instruction to this day.

Reason for His Staying in Particular Places

After his final Attainment in the forests of Chiangmai, there seemed to have been a definite reason for his staying in a certain place, especially a place where he stayed for an unusually long period of time. The reason was never made known to anyone, but could easily be discerned after careful observation. While in the town of Nakorn Rajasima, on his way back from Chiangmai, for example, there were a number of devotees, both bhikkhu and lay disciples, who submitted themselves to his teaching and training, and later proved to have made satisfactory progress in mind-development. Some even followed him to Udorn Thani and Sakol Nakhorn, until the day of his passing away. They were all firmly established in their respective levels of attainment. In the case of bhikkhus, a number of them afterwards became well-known Acharns or meditation masters who have shouldered the task of teaching and training devotees in his place to this day. His lay disciples of that time are also working with dedication for the sake of dharma in their respective fields.

During the Rains Retreat at Udorn Thani, his eminence the Venerable Chao Khun, who had been one of the Venerable Acharn's disciples in the early days, had undertaken to introduce the people there, both bhikkhus and lay disciples, to the Venerable Acharn. His eminence always took pains to take care of the Venerable Acharn and urged the people to make merit and to listen to his instructions as often as possible.

It is possible that the Venerable Acharn remained in the village of Namone in the township of Sakol Nakhorn because of an old white-robed laywoman devotee who was head of the lay group of disciples there. He regularly gave her instructions and praised her for her progress in mind development, which, he said, was seldom seen.

Mind-Reading Ability of an Old Female Lay Devotee

The village of Nong Phue was situated in a large valley with a wide area which was suitable as a place for dhutanga bhikkhus. As in the village of Namone, there was an old white-robed laywoman devotee of about eighty years of age. She was an eminent meditator who was specially helped by the Venerable Acharn. She was very feeble and

had to walk with the aid of a walking-stick, yet she would painstakingly struggle out of her house to see him, and would have to stop to catch her breath three or four times before she reached his place, panting and trembling with fatigue. It was a pitiful sight to see her suffer so much, but it was also encouraging to see her strength of will.

Sometimes the Venerable Acharn pretended to scold her, asking why she struggled so much since it made her very tired. But she would not be discouraged and frankly told him why she had come. He then asked her about her experiences during meditation and gave her explanations and instructions. Besides her attainment in meditation, she also possessed the psychic powers of character reading and communication with beings on other planes of existence. She often related to him her strange experiences during meditation with complete frankness and courage and was not embarrassed by the scores of bhikkhus and samaneras who were there listening to her. He would laugh, saying that she was very frank and fearless.

Most interesting was her character-reading ability. With regards to the Venerable Acharn, she referred to him saying, 'The Venerable Acharn's mind has long since attained to Deliverance. I knew this a long time ago. Your mind is unequalled here or elsewhere. It is supreme in the worlds. But why do you still meditate every day?'

He laughed and gave her an instructive answer. 'I will keep up my exertion until I die. There is no shrinking back from exertion. Whoever does so is not the Tathagata's disciple.'

'But for you there is no coming or going,' she insisted. 'I have looked at your mind. It is fully bright and supreme, covering all the worlds. There is nothing to be kept secret from you. But my mind is not yet fully developed. That's why I have to come here for your instruction.'

Her dialogue with the Venerable Acharn was convincing proof to others how she had made good progress in her meditation. Whenever she encountered a problem which she could not solve herself, she would always take pains to struggle out of her house with her walking-stick. He always took pity on her and gave her special attention in instructing her. Whenever she came to see him, the bhikkhus and samaneras would stealthily crowd nearby, listening attentively to her experiences and the Venerable Acharn's explanations. It was truly interesting and impressive.

Her experiences were varied, including both insight concerning the Noble Truths, and communication with celestial beings on various planes. Sometimes he encouraged her to further contemplation, while at other times he advised against her being involved with such phenomena.

She also told him about the minds of the bhikkhus and samaneras staying with him, which made them all the more curious, and, of course, all the more worried. She said that there was an order of brightness from the mind of the Venerable Acharn down to the minds of his bhikkhus and samaneras like the order of the magnitude of stars. It was a heartening sight, she said, to see their minds shining with the light of dharma, not being clouded in darkness and dismay. Even the minds of the young bhikkhus and small samaneras were also illumined by the dharma in proportion to their attainment.

She also told him of the realms of Brahma, asking him why there were only bhikkhus, but no lay disciples. He replied that they were all anagami (Non-returners) when they were bhikkhus in the human world. There were also a few lay disciples. Then he asked her why

she hadn't asked them herself when she 'went up there'. She laughed and said that she had forgotten to do so, but that the next time she went, she would remember to do so. His answer served two purposes: one, to clear up her doubt, and two, to warn her against spending too much time in 'outside' things instead of concentrating more on contemplation of inner truths, which are the direct path to Deliverance. This the old woman obediently followed.

The Venerable Acharn appreciated her attainment saying that she was equipped with knowledge that was more developed than many bhikkhus. It is possible that he stayed in the village of Nong Phue for such a long time because of this old white-robed laywoman devotee and her attainment.

Other reasons were that the village was a center of practicing Buddhists, both bhikkhus and lay devotees, both those in the valley itself and those in nearby areas which abounded in forests, mountains, caves, and secluded places for those who preferred a solitary life.

The Venerable Acharn stayed in the village of Nong Phue for five years. He was now getting old and more feeble, being already seventy-five. He did not often go out to secluded areas as had been his habit before, but remained in villages as shelter and refuge for his developing disciples, like a great tree giving shelter, warmth and fruit to birds and men. There was not much communication with invisible beings here, any communication at all being occasional. The help he gave to bhikkhus and lay devotees here was more effective than elsewhere in the town of Sakol Nakhorn.

The village, as earlier mentioned, was surrounded by forests and mountains, and was also a malaria-infested area. During the rainy season, those who visited him would be advised to return within a short time, whereas those who came during the dry season would be allowed to stay longer. Those who came down with malaria were required to exercise their patience to the utmost. There was little hope for conventional medicine at that time. Patients who were his disciples were trained to awaken the therapeutical effect of dharma to cure themselves. Whatever pain and suffering occurred had to be used as exercises in contemplation and as tests for the strength of mindfulness-and-wisdom. This was the only way for them to avoid being taken possession of by suffering and also to shorten the period of their illness.

Facing Ordeals

Whoever can face ordeals of suffering and pain when illness strikes and who then survives such ordeals by the courage produced by mindfulness-and-wisdom, is sure to be unshakable in time of future illness as well as in time of good health. Whenever an emergency arises or he is faced with death, he will be unfailingly equipped with the presence of mind which can carry him to the realization of all manifestations of suffering as a Noble Truth. The critical moment of death is then seen as a natural phenomenon, as one aspect of life. The Noble Truth is known through wisdom, with no clinging-desire whatsoever, but with realized truth always present in the mind. It is this mindfulness-and-wisdom which comes to the aspirant's rescue in time of emergencies, pulling him to Security by means of its contemplative function. No longer is he a helpless victim as he used to be when suffering was not made the object of contemplation. Physically he may look tired and weak, like other patients, but mentally his mindfulness-and-wisdom is like a brave soldier preparing to go to war. It is putting up a fight and there is no worry about

how much or what kind of suffering is going to arise. What is present in the mind is the will to detect whatever suffering occurs, and then to recognize it with detachment as such, as mere phenomena of body, sensations, conditions of mind, and natural phenomena. There is no fear of any manifestation of suffering. Fear, if any, should be the fear that mindfulness-and-wisdom may not be able to detect and recognize the conditions of suffering in time.

As far as efforts in contemplation are concerned, there must be no worry about how painstaking or immense those efforts may become. Such worrying has a destructive, weakening effect and is placing an obstacle in one's own path of progress. Only the thought of how to preserve the acquired contemplation ability is allowed to arise, so that action may be taken accordingly which will eventually be accomplished through the development of mindfulness, wisdom, faith and exertion. With overall truth realized, suffering is true [in its own plane], so is the body and mind. Each is true [in the plane where each belongs], there being no conflict or overlap. The cause of suffering [desire] then subsides, with the disappearance of worry and fear of suffering, of illness and of death. Such worries and fears are negative, destructive and depressing. When mindfulness-and-wisdom has completely performed its duty, the fever will disappear or, if it does not, it will not progress to such an extent that it will disturb one's peacefulness of mind anymore. In other words, there is no longer the former condition of twofold suffering: that of body and that of mind.

The Dharma Gives Protection to Whoever Follows It

This contemplation effort, especially in times of illness or suffering and pain, is always recommended as a means by which to sharpen the weapon of mindfulness-and-wisdom. The suffering mentioned above refers to both that of the body *and* that of the mind. The loss of control of oneself in time of pain and suffering is a mark of defeat and failure in the mind-development of an aspirant. This is the result of neglecting to forge a weapon for self-defence in a fight against the enemy, who takes advantage of such a lack of mindfulness-and-wisdom. On the contrary, an aspirant who manages to keep himself calm and poised, despite the relentless attack of suffering, is honored and respected as a real fighter. It is, in fact, this fighting spirit that is the aim of practicing the dharma. He has achieved the result of such practice and is thus revealing it for others to see. A real fighter never gives way to the attack, even though it means the death of his body. But the mind is not to divorce itself from mindfulness-and-wisdom, which is its only support in the event that body is damaged beyond repair. Such is the practice recommended in the circle of dhutanga bhikkhus.

Once an aspirant has realized the truth, he becomes unshakable in the midst of the enemy's attack. He keeps on fighting, even to the death of the body, which, after all, is to be expected sooner or later, but his mind is inseparably equipped with the defence weapon of mindfulness-and-wisdom, which eventually pulls him through as a victor to Security. This is evidence of the Buddha's saying '*dharmo have rakkhati dhammacarin*' - the dharma gives protection to whoever follows it. Anyone who is steadfast in his practice and who is determined in following the dharma is sure to give witness to this truth, whereas anyone who is fickle and irresolute cannot expect to receive anything worthwhile. Effects cannot contradict their causes. Such is the dharma well-expounded by the Buddha.

Dhutanga bhikkhus always aspire to attain the fruits of the Buddha's Dispensation as

much as possible within this lifetime. The peaceful bliss of meditation and the arrow-removing effect of wisdom are what they aim at here and now. Whatever the outcome of these attempts, they always equip themselves with devotion and persistent effort.

Model of Wisdom and Endurance

The Venerable Acharn never neglected to encourage the bhikkhus and samaneras under him to live up to their duties, both in times of illness and in times of good health. His sermons recommended the fighting spirit for the sake of deliverance through self-effort. Anyone showing signs of weakness and impatience in times of illness would be severely reproached with the possibility of being prohibited from receiving medical treatment or being nursed by his friends. Groans and other signs of impatience are not the means by which to remove suffering, nor are they characteristic of a bhikkhu who must be a model of wisdom and endurance. Such weaknesses must be absolutely banned from the circle of practicing Buddhists, otherwise it would be a discouraging example for others to follow, resulting in more and more people shrieking and writhing like dying animals. Should suffering and pain be cured by such hysterical reactions, other medical treatment would be of no avail. In short, these uncontrolled reactions are but expressions of their own contemptible weakness.

Anyone who courageously faced pain and suffering with mindfulness-and-wisdom was always congratulated. The Venerable Acharn would praise and delight him with an impressive sermon. Even after his recovery, he would again be praised.

'That's what we must do as fighters in our battle with suffering,' said the Venerable Acharn. 'There must not be a complaint about too much suffering. Our duty is to fight it, regardless of how much or how little of it comes our way. It is advisable to say ourselves: "Come what may, we shall fight tooth and nail. We shall fight to the last minute and to the last drop of blood. There shall be no retreat or retirement." All sufferings are for us to determine and contemplate, being themselves a manifestation of a Noble Truth. How can a person realize all sufferings who still refuses to face any kind or degree of suffering? It was through this contemplation ability that the Buddha is called Buddha. Never was it possible through grumbling or groaning.

'Did the Buddha ever teach that anyone who wanted to realize the truth must grumble and groan his way to it?' he asked. 'Such would have been a new method which has outdated the dharma of the Buddha. I cling to the dharma, no matter how old it is. I have faith in the Buddha and cannot force myself to contradict him, for that would be committing suicide.'

Such was the teaching he gave his bhikkhu disciples who surrendered themselves to the suffering of an illness or of any rigorous practice during exertion. Those who neglected contemplation activity during such challenging moments were sure to receive the Venerable Acharn's strong disapproval. This was so that they might be encouraged to awaken the contemplation ability in themselves which would yield the therapeutic effects of the dharma. It was through this method that they could progress steadily towards Deliverance.

Death of Two Bhikkhus

Two bhikkhus died during the Venerable Acharn's stay in the village of Nong Phue. One was a middle-aged bhikkhu who had taken ordination for the sake of practicing the dharma [not for only studying dharma] and who had stayed with the Venerable Acharn occasionally in different places, from Chiangmai to Udorn Thani to Sakol Nakhorn, and who then passed away at the village of Nong Phue. He had made satisfactory progress in meditation, whereas in wisdom he was receiving regular instruction from the Venerable Acharn. His character was determined and his practice resolute. Despite his illiteracy, he was able to deliver sermons in a very impressive and instructive manner, giving lucid explanations and examples. Unfortunately, he had long suffered from tuberculosis and passed away peacefully one morning at about seven o'clock. The manner of his passing was an impressive example of one who had devoted himself to the practice of dharma. It testified to the fact that a well-trained mind can be detached from the condition of the body at the moment of the body's dissolution.

This is the critical moment when the strength of will and wisdom is put to a crucial test in the most individual, personal matter, where no one, not even the most beloved of oneself, can lend a helping hand. It is a moment which will come to all, the good and the evil, the wise and the foolish, the strong and the weak. What results from this encounter is again most private and personal, the sole possession of each. Hence the greatest value of the Buddha's warning (in the Dhammapada):

The world is shrouded in darkness.
It is continuously consumed [by its own defilements].
What's the use of indulgence and merry-making?
Why don't you seek out the light?

As long as one lives being shrouded in darkness, so long will one die groping in the dark and then suffer the results in the dark realms. For those who live their lives overcome by indulgence and over-confidence, the above passage should be a stern warning, enough to make them wake up and be embarrassed. The mind of a worldling is often unruly and stubborn. It needs frequent warnings, scoldings and reprobations. The accounts of the two bhikkhus who passed away in the village of Nong Phue are meant to serve just this purpose.

Just before that middle-aged bhikkhu passed away, the Venerable Acharn and other bhikkhus who were going out for alms-food, were able to witness his passing away and to apply it is a valuable lesson and warning for each. Some moments after his passing away, the Venerable Acharn, who had kept quiet all this time, said to the other bhikkhus in a solemn manner. 'There is nothing to worry about with regards to him now. He has taken rebirth in the sixth of the Brahma realms, the Abhassara. Had he lived a little longer to further his insight, he could have taken birth in any of the five higher realms and then proceeded from there to Deliverance without having to come back here again. But this is a trifle and is no difficulty now. Whatever difficulties and worries there are at present should be those regarding yourselves. Where are you preparing to go? To a realm of animals, demons, hell, heaven or nirvana? Take heed of the compass of your ship, your own attitude of mind. In what direction is it headed? Always set the compass of your own attitude of mind to the right direction *before* this moment comes to you. After that there is no more correction possible.'

The second bhikkhu died of malaria. He had been born in the town of Ubol Rajathani

and passed away only one month after he had contracted malaria. Before his death, another bhikkhu learned of his fate through a meditation-vision.

While engaged in a dharma-discussion with the Venerable Acharn one evening, he related his vision to the Venerable Acharn, saying that during his contemplation the previous night, his mind happened to withdraw into the state of one-pointedness, and then he saw the Venerable Acharn standing before a pile of firewood. In his vision the Venerable Acharn was seen to give an order to someone to pile the firewood there and to say that the firewood would be used to cremate that ailing bhikkhu at that place, since it was better than any other place. He expressed his surprise to the Venerable Acharn, asking why it should be so since it seemed to him that that bhikkhu's illness was not in any way so serious.

In reply the Venerable Acharn said that he already knew that bhikkhu's illness was fatal, but that there was nothing to worry about with regards to his hereafter. 'He was sure to go to a realm of bliss, but he was not to be told of his forthcoming death. Otherwise, he might become frightened and the realm of bliss which he was destined to enter might be lost to him.

A few days after that, the patient was suddenly stricken by the fever symptoms of malaria late at night, and after a few hours, peacefully passed away. The Venerable Acharn was able to foresee future events, as can be seen from this episode, but sometimes, having known what would happen, he preferred not to mention it to anyone.

There was yet another bhikkhu who had also been stricken with malaria. He ran a temperature in the morning. His condition was so serious that he could not go out for alms-food and also could not partake of a meal. He fought against the fever by contemplating it from morning until three o'clock in the afternoon, when the fever subsided. He was so tired from contemplation that he just concentrated on it without the exercise of wisdom. It was also at that time that the Venerable Acharn was scrutinizing his practice. When, at four o'clock in the afternoon, he went to see the Venerable Acharn, he was warned that such a way of practice would not be profitable.

'You cannot realize the nature of the body, sensations, conditions of mind and phenomena as long as you merely allow your mind to dwell upon it,' the Venerable Acharn said. 'Such a method is a hermit's method or a method like a dog-fight, not the pathway of a bhikkhu who wishes to realize the truth of all things. You won't be able to realize anything using that method. I was checking what you were doing and saw you merely focus your attention on the suffering without the use of wisdom. You won't make any progress that way. Remember that wisdom must be made to underlie all contemplation efforts. This is the way to the Cessation of Suffering.'

A 'Tough Guy' Who Was Afraid of Tigers-Let What You Are Afraid of Be Your Trainer and Teacher

The Venerable Acharn's help to his disciples was not limited by time and place. It depended on when his help was needed for a particular case at a particular time. He once spoke frankly to a disciple, saying, 'You had better go and meditate in that cave. It will be better than staying here. You require strong treatment. There is a tiger in that cave who will give you the kind of treatment needed by such a stubborn bhikkhu as

you. With the tiger as your instructor, you might be able to learn something more. You are afraid of tigers, so you must welcome him as your trainer and teacher. One who is afraid of ghosts must also accept them as his trainers. This is the right way of self-training.'

That bhikkhu had been known as a 'tough guy' when he was a layman. He was bold and frank and rather stubborn. Having been given this 'strong' treatment, he decided to do as he was told, reasoning to himself that that Venerable Acharn would not send him to his death.

'Come what may, I must go,' he said to himself, 'for then I'll be able to see the truth of the Venerable Acharn's words. It's known that the Venerable Acharn never says anything without careful thought. His words always carry some hidden meaning. He has shown that he knows our thoughts very well. He must also know what will happen to me in that cave, otherwise he would not have told me to go there. I'm going to go. If I die there, well, it's time for me to die. But if I don't die, I may realize something which is unknown to me now. He has given me a hint. Now I'm going to do what he has told me to do.'

Having made up his mind, he dressed himself fully [in all his robes] and approached the Venerable Acharn to take leave of him.

'Where are you going?' the Venerable Acharn asked him.

'I'm going to meet my death in that cave!' that bhikkhu answered outright.

'I didn't tell you to go and die there! I told you to go there for the sake of your mind-development!' the Venerable Acharn said.

'It's true that you didn't tell me to go there to die, but I have learnt from others that there is a large ferocious tiger living in a cave not far from the one to which I am going, and that my cave is on the path it takes to and from its cave every day. That tiger has also been in and out of my cave. I am afraid that it may really kill me. That's why I answered you the way I did.'

The Venerable Acharn then asked him why, despite the fact that so many bhikkhus had stayed in that cave, no one had ever been bothered by the tiger. 'Do you think that tiger will find your flesh to be more delectable than those others?' he asked. The mind is a clever magician. It is full of tricks and guiles to lure or frighten an aspirant away from his goal. Without sincere and ruthless self-criticism an aspirant would never be able to discipline or develop his mind. 'This is only at the outset,' he warned that bhikkhu, 'and you have already been hypnotized by the whispers of defilements. Do you think you can survive this or deal with this? You haven't even encountered death yet, so why are you afraid of it? I will tell you the truth. It is birth which is the original cause of death. Why aren't you afraid of birth? Everyone craves endless births, despite the fact that one birth is enough to produce untold suffering. Were one man able to branch out like bamboo, he would be more than happy to do so without even thinking of death, which surely would bring about fear capable of consuming him a hundred times over.'

'You are a practicing Buddhist! Why should you be so afraid of death perhaps even more so than an untrained layman? Why do you succumb to the attack of defilements so easily until you are now at your wit's end? You have your mindfulness and wisdom! Why don't you make use of them and silence the whispers and threats of the defilements so that their tricks and guiles may be uncovered?'

'Only on the battlefield can the warrior's victory be won. If you are afraid of death, it's no use going to war. It's only through fearlessly facing death that victory can be won. If you genuinely hope for the Cessation of Suffering, you must know that fear of death is a kind of suffering which you impose on yourself, and you must rid yourself of it on the battlefield where you will be able to see the evil of your self imposed suffering. This is far better than surrendering yourself to the whisper of the defilements and being under its yoke for eternity.

'Just make up your mind what you will choose to believe: the dharma and the instruction of your Acharn, or the whisper of the defilements that tigers are everywhere just waiting to make a meal of you. I instructed and disciplined myself in this way with the result that is evident to you now. May you make the correct choice for yourself.'

That bhikkhu's mind seemed to be relieved of its burden and filled with ecstasy at the Venerable Acharn's frank and straightforward instruction. He prostrated himself before the Venerable Acharn and, having taken leave of him, delightedly set out for the cave.

Still ecstatic, he arrived at the cave and having put down his requisites, he looked around to see where he could take shelter for the night. In a flash his eyes began to play tricks on him. He caught sight of the tiger's paw marks at the mouth of the cave, and then there was a whispering in his ear 'There is a tiger living here!' The defilements then took possession of him and he felt as if he were being overwhelmed by the madness of fear. Gone were the ecstasy and courage obtained from the Venerable Acharn's instruction. What filled him now was chilling fear, which was overwhelming and which resisted all efforts to neutralize its power. He tried to reduce it by erasing the paw marks, but the fear was still there - it was in his mind, not in the paw marks, Fear stubbornly attached itself to his mind.

Throughout that night and all the next day he was plagued with this 'unsolvable' problem of fear. With the coming of night once again, his fear increased and it seemed that that place was literally alive with tigers. He was then consumed by the chill fever characteristic of malaria which added physical suffering to the mental and made that place a real hell on earth for him. But he was, after all, to be praised because he did not give up his effort, despite repeated failure and disappointment.

He kept on fighting against his own fear by various means while suffering intensely from fever symptoms. Whenever he recalled the Venerable Acharn's instructions he was for a time encouraged, and fear subsided. When the fear later increased in its intensity he was emboldened in facing danger and death.

'I made up my mind before coming here,' he said to himself, 'and I told the Venerable Acharn that I came here to die. I came here filled with courage and ecstasy, but what am I doing now? It's shameful to be so overwhelmed by fear like this! It is my own mind that urged me to come here, and it is this very same mind which is now playing tricks on me, driving me mad with fear. What is it all about? Am I not the same man? Have I been turned into a cowardly animal? I had better make up my mind now: should I sit meditating on the edge of the precipice so that without presence of mind I might fall and perish below? In that case there would be but vultures and crows to finish up my remains, with no trouble for any human beings to cremate the corpse. Or should I meditate on the tiger's pathway? That would save it the trouble of having to look for me when it returns.'

Having thought about this in this way, he came out of his mosquito net and stood in front of the cave making up his mind. He finally decided to sit on the edge of the precipice so that a split second without mindfulness would send him into the abyss to be a feast for the vultures and crows. He sat facing the lowlands, his back towards to tiger's pathway, reciting the word *buddho* with the thought in the back of his mind that a split second without mindfulness would send him to his death. All this time he contemplated whether he was more afraid of falling over the cliff or being eaten by the tiger, and he came to realize that he was more afraid of falling to his death [which was more immediate and therefore more threatening] than being eaten by the tiger.

It was long after he had begun this resolute self-discipline that his mind abruptly withdrew into the profound, unshakable condition of meditation [appana samadhi] and was thereafter oblivious to all circumstances. Gone were worry and fear. What remained was the mind that was wonderfully able to hold its own.

This complete withdrawal lasted twelve hours, from ten 'o'clock in the evening until ten o'clock the following morning, when he emerged from his meditation. There was no need to go for alms food that day or to partake of any meal. The results of his meditation were more wonderful than he could have dreamed of. There was no longer any trace or tinge of fear, nor were there any symptoms of fever. He felt more courageous and self-confident than ever. It now appeared that the effects of the dharma were both therapeutical and psychological, curing both diseases of body and mind. From then on he felt himself able stay or go anywhere, without having to carry fear along with him. He cared little about the tiger, except that should it actually come it would be an opportunity to test his strength of will.

He always thought of the Venerable Acharn's instruction with gratefulness and reverence, having realized how that instruction was wonderfully true and beneficial to him. He now knew the trick of how to train and tame his own mind and always resorted to making use of fear to overcome fear.

He chose to remain in that cave for a longer time, choosing the most dangerous locations as places suitable for his meditation practice. These included the mouth of the cave the tiger lived in or on the path which the tiger used every day. While sitting in meditation, he did not sit under his mosquito net since he was afraid that within it he might indulge himself in over-confidence, and not be afraid of the tiger.

One night his mind refused to withdraw into the profound state of meditation, no matter how long or how hard he tried. He then thought of the tiger which frequented the place, asking himself where it was at that moment, for it should have been there to help him in his meditation practice, which, in fact, was by no means difficult if properly aroused. About half an hour after this thought had passed through his mind, he heard the sounds of the tiger's approach from behind him. Hearing this he warned himself that danger was now approaching and that it was now time to seek the shelter of one-pointedness. Once he visualized himself being grappled by the neck by the tiger, his mind suddenly withdrew into one-pointedness with nothing remaining but the unshakable and indescribable peace of oneness. He retired into the seclusion of the mind from about two o'clock in the morning until about ten o'clock, and, as before, he felt no need for going out for alms-food or for having a meal.

It should be noted here that while the mind is in the state of complete withdrawal at the

so-called basis of meditation, the body no longer responds to, nor is aware of, the external environment. This was also the experience of this bhikkhu since his mind always abruptly retired into that state whenever aroused by external circumstances.

After emerging from his meditation, he went to the place where he had heard the sounds of his 'friend' and clearly saw his paw marks only about four meters away from where he was sitting. Strangely enough, the tiger had gone straight to its cave without showing any interest in his 'friend' sitting not far away.

That bhikkhu later related that, 'It is very difficult to train a mind without any pressure or force to tame it. A moment of danger is often helpful in making it retire into seclusion within split seconds. This is why I always prefer a dangerous place to an ordinary cave or forest. Wherever there are tigers, it is better for me to be there. After all, my character is still crude and that's why gentle means are never enough to tame my mind.'

'There were also side effects,' he continued. 'Besides the bliss and peace obtained within that cave, there was communication with the terrestrial angels and also something like insight into the future as far as the dead were concerned. I appeared suddenly to be able to know whenever someone died in the village not far away, and everything that knowledge foretold proved to be correct. The cave where I was staying was about eight kilometers away from the nearest village and every time this knowledge occurred to me, I was later requested by the villagers to perform the rites for the deceased in their village. Despite my refusal, they always insisted, saying that a bhikkhu in that forest area was so rare, and they begged me earnestly to have mercy on them. I could do nothing but comply with their requests, which meant walking the long distance to the village and back. Even during periods of fasting, when I did not want anything to interrupt my exertion, similar incidents still occurred and similar forest trips had to be undertaken.'

Friend tiger contributed much to the strength of will of this bhikkhu. Every two or three nights it would leave the cave to find food, but strangely, it still took no interest in this bhikkhu despite the fact that it had to pass by him every time it left and returned. From that time onwards he always preferred to meditate in whatever dangerous place he was able to find, all the time living a solitary life.

This is the story of a steadfast and dedicated man who subjected his mind to self-discipline and was able to take advantage of his own fear. Most interesting is how he changed the tiger, which should have been his dreaded enemy, into a friend who helped to develop his strength of will and determination.

In the Forest Village of Nong Phue

The Venerable Acharn for many years stayed in the forest village of Nong Phue peacefully and blissfully with many of the dhutanga bhikkhus under his guidance developing steadily and satisfactorily in their strength of will. Within the periods of the Rains Retreats there were as many as twenty bhikkhus staying with him, but they were all well-behaved and posed no problem for him. With a common goal they were all of one mind, being like the same limb or organ of the body.

Their going out for alms-food in the morning was an impressive sight. They walked single file and made a long line. There were benches or long seats prepared for them by the villagers, on which they would sit to recite the anumodana or acknowledgement

passages after they had been offered food. Back in the hermitage they partook of their meal together in the same place, sitting in a long line in order of their seniority in years of ordination. Having finished their meal, they washed and wiped their alms-bowls, put them in their bowl-bags and kept them in a proper place. They then retired to their own shelters around the hermitage and started their walking and sitting meditation for a longer or shorter period, depending on individual requirements. They would be seen to gather together once again about four o'clock in the afternoon when it was time to help clean the hermitage area and do some work in common, which included sweeping the area, cleaning the floor of the meeting-hall, filling the jars and other water containers with water for drinking, bathing, and for other uses. They went back to their places to resume their exertion until the time came for rest at night.

When there was to be a meeting at night, which generally took place once a week, they would come together once again at the meeting-hall for the Venerable Acharn's instructions, but those who encountered special problem or doubts were permitted to see the Venerable Acharn for advice any time when he was at his leisure, such as after the meal, in the afternoon, about five o'clock in the evening and again at about eight o'clock at night.

The private dharma discussions at night were perhaps the most interesting. There were strange problems and unique experiences related to him by various disciples from various places far and near. Some were about inner dharma realization, whereas others were outward events such as communication with invisible beings. They were all impressive and encouraging and the listeners never seemed to get enough of them. They were also lessons which could be applied to others under the same circumstances. Those asking him questions were of various grades of mind-development, so the questions concerned various levels of attainment. These questions again varied in detail due to the variety of the tendencies of each questioner, but all were likewise deeply encouraging and delightful, especially to those putting forth effort for the same attainment. No less delightful were the accounts of the Venerable Acharn's own life and exertion or other stories which he occasionally related to his disciples. Some were amusing, others touching, and still others awe-inspiring.

Whatever his disciples had seen, heard and felt was gradually absorbed and served as a benign transformer for their own good. Due to their awareness of his psychic powers, they forced themselves to strict self-control, to exercise mindfulness and wisdom and were always on the alert for exertion. Otherwise, they would be sternly warned and reprimanded during the meeting hour. Even with such rigorous self-observation, there were occasions when he revealed faults during the meeting, which were sometimes quite embarrassing. But they were glad to admit their faults and accept such wrongs as lessons for further advancement.

Staying with the Venerable Acharn could be a torment as well as a blessing. This depended upon the disciples themselves. To those seeking the dharma it was, of course, a great blessing, whereas to others feeding defilements it was, no doubt, fiery torment. Those of crude character would often be sternly warned and reprimanded, but they would find it acceptable as long as they sought the dharma, for only in that way would they be able to 'breathe' dharma and not defilements.

Accounts of the Venerable Acharn's own exertions in the various stages and places of his development did not fail to 'breathe' dharma, especially ecstasy and buoyancy, into disciples, but in the actual moments of their own exertion, they often found

disappointment. Instead of ecstasy and buoyancy, they often encountered the brake and forcible drag of gravity. This was especially true of the writer who was often embarrassed and exasperated. His mind seemed to be heavily pulled back by something forceful and it exercised stubborn resistance at every attempt to train or uplift it. Without steadfastness of aim and devotion to practice, the mind is sure to drag a person down into the mire of defilements, irrespective of time, place, and age. This shows how the Buddha and his Noble Disciples, who have successfully developed their minds and overcome the drag of defilements, are really worthy of the supreme reverence of all Buddhists.

In modern times the writer would frankly like to say and with all sincerity of heart that the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun, whose biography is being presented here, was without a doubt one of the Buddha's Noble Disciples. He was always determined and flawless in his mode of practice, never allowing himself any laxity, even in old age when he should have stopped his exertion and lived in comfort. His walking meditation, for instance, was still strenuous and unsurpassed by any young disciple. His selfless assistance, whether in the form of regular instructions or discussions, was never neglected. The elements of rigorous practice and resolution were always present in his sermons and instructions. His listeners were never disappointed in this respect, for they never failed to find his sermons strongly encouraging and stimulating. Never did he allow any compromise or leniency in the Quest for Truth and Deliverance.

The Austere Practices to at Least Frighten Away Defilements

There is no doubt that the Venerable Acharn testified to the truth and practicability of the Buddha-dharma in its three levels of study, practice, and fruition. The thirteen dhutanga [austere] practices, which have been so much neglected in modern times, were revived in the Northeast mainly by Phra Acharn Sao [the Venerable Acharn's meditation master] and the Venerable Acharn himself. It was through their initiative and devotion that such practices have been accepted and popularly practiced in modern times. The two Venerable Meditation Masters undertook all the thirteen practices, some regularly and continuously [see pages 38-48], and others occasionally, depending on circumstances. Benefits to be derived from the observance of these dhutanga rules are manifold, but most important is the fact that they prevent the overflowing of defilements and entitle dhutanga bhikkhus to be called 'dhutanga bhikkhus'.

Each of these dhutanga practices serves to tighten security measures against the whisper of defilements, if each is sincerely and heedfully observed. There is, in fact, no defilement that is not afraid of the dhutanga practices, unless we ourselves are afraid of these practices, fearing lest they should make us suffer. At the same time, we pretend to forget how the defilements can also make us suffer no less than the dhutanga practices. This is a great gap through which the defilements can exert themselves, whispering to us a variety of their invented excuses. One such excuse is that these dhutanga practices are now out of date, and as such, should be left to themselves since they incur unnecessary and unprofitable suffering. This is the main cause of the dhutanga practices being largely neglected and the defilements being allowed a free hand. The results of this neglect are too obvious to be mentioned here.

A dhutanga bhikkhu owns few possessions which he is trained not to be attached to. Thus he always lives and travels lightly, not being weighed down by the weight of possessions and that of defilements. Some of these practices may also be occasionally

observed by a lay devotee, with the same beneficial effects as can be hoped for by a bhikkhu, since the defilements of both bhikkhus and laymen are the same.

Each dhutanga practice has a characteristic virtue which is profound and not easily explained, and the consequent result obtained by one who genuinely observes it is also profound and not easily explained. This characteristic virtue is difficult to express in terms of language and is to be experienced by the individual observers of these practices themselves. Suffice it to say that the benefits to be derived from such practices are so many and profound that they are beyond description. One most important fact is that what transforms a worldling into a Noble Disciple through persistent and dedicated effort cannot be other than these austere practices. In this respect the Venerable Acharn was always exemplary from the beginning to the end. It does not thus befit a practicing Buddhist to neglect or look down on these practices, regarding them as unnecessary or unprofitable. From the writer's own experiences, some of these dhutanga practices are indispensable and the writer would like to offer his own personal viewpoint that anyone who aims at counteracting the influence of the defilements, from their crudest manifestations to their most subtle, will always find the dhutanga observances the most helpful and the most effective way for the achievement of his goal.

The Venerable Acharn's Final Illness

After having spent five years in the village of Nong Phue, the Venerable Acharn's seventy-nine year old body began to show signs of illness. It was about the month of March, the hot season of B.E. 2492 [CE 1949], being one month before the full moon of the fourth lunar month. This was the first day of the illness which later proved to be his last. That day was therefore the beginning of the final end of his physical existence and the beginning of an irretrievable loss for his disciples.

The first stage of his illness was characterized by his running a temperature along with a slight cough. These symptoms, although not very serious, were intermittent and created irrepressible anxiety in those around him. The Venerable Acharn himself already knew that this was to be his last illness and announced this fact to his disciples, telling them that there would be no remedy to cure this disease. From then on he took no interest in any medicine at all and showed an expression of irritation when offered any.

'This is the illness of an old man who cannot be made to live longer by any means,' he said. 'Nothing can be found to cure it. The countdown has begun. I am like an old tree that is going to die standing up. No amount of water or fertiliser can save it since its hours are numbered and it is destined to topple to the ground very soon. This time my illness is exactly like that. What's the use of any medical treatment? Didn't I tell you long before this that you must not be overconfident and heedless? You must put forth your utmost effort while I am still living. If ever there are any doubts or problems, I may be able to help you before I die. If you seek my help while I am still alive and am still of some use to you and your practice, you won't have any regrets later on.'

'This is the law of changeability or flux now proving itself on my body, which is soon to dissolve. Remember that I told you this already three years ago. Now the time has come and nothing can be done about it to alter it. The law of change, flux and non-self is continuously operating on every man and animal. Its operation will become effective on my body within a few months' time. This is the irreversible truth.'

From that day onwards there was no improvement in his illness, which could sometimes be checked but never cured. No amount of medicine was really effective. He never had any desire to take medicine, but often forced himself to take it at the insistence of many people, all of whom eagerly promised the efficacy of their remedies. They implored him to try their cures so that he might live on and be the refuge and shelter for his disciples.

'But no medicine is of any use to me now,' he told them. 'What can be of use to me is firewood [for the cremation pyre].'

With no such insight as he had, they just could not help being worried and went on insisting. Out of compassion for them he took a little of the remedies offered.

Endless Throng of Visitors

News of his final illness soon spread rapidly. People swarmed to the village of Nong Phue from far and near, lay disciples as well as bhikkhus and samaneras. They came from all directions, irrespective of the distances and the inconveniences of transport and travel involved. Rain or shine they came in an endless throng to the village which was deep in the forest and mountains, about twenty-five to thirty kilometres off the highway between the towns of Udorn Thani and Sakol Nakhorn. Except for the aged, who travelled in hired bullock-carts, they all went to see him on foot from the highway.

The Venerable Acharn preferred seclusion and did not want to be disturbed, even by the bhikkhus and samaneras staying with him. When, under these circumstances, there were such great numbers of people who wished to see him in their concern about his health, it became a discomfort to him and an inconvenience to both visitors and those attending upon him. In special cases, leniencies were necessary, and for this purpose care had to be taken in screening the visitors. Bhikkhus and samaneras waiting upon him also had to also be carefully selected.

The Venerable Acharn was careful by habit, never overlooking rules or other details. Those who would have anything to do with him had to be able to conform to his wishes. Whenever there were people or some of his disciples wishing to see him, they were told to wait outside so that the Venerable Acharn could first be informed. After his permission had been received, they would be permitted to see him. He would then instruct them for a while and then they would be told to take leave of him. This was his normal practice in ordinary cases. Exceptions were those who were his close disciples who would be given more time for private talk and discussion.

His health deteriorated slowly but steadily. Ever since he had first fallen ill, the atmosphere pervading the hermitage had been one of distress and despair. Sad faces were to be seen everywhere. Conversations always began with the Venerable Acharn's illness, and, after a few other topics, ended with his illness. The Venerable Acharn's instructions to his bhikkhus and samaneras were still regularly given, however, only details being less extensive. After the instructions, there were answers to questions put to him by individual disciples concerning their insight or personal experiences during meditation. Then the meeting was dismissed and all were told to continue their exertion at their own places.

There were no signs of illness during his teachings and discussions. His voice was still loud and clear, his manner courageous as ever with the strength of a healthy man and stress laid, as always, on rigorous and resolute practice. It was only after such times that he

showed signs of weariness and so they readily took leave of him.

His Wonderful Sermon

On the full moon day of the month of Magha B.E. 2492 [CE 1949], shortly before he was taken ill, he gave a sermon which lasted four hours [from eight o'clock in the evening until midnight]. So wonderful was his Magha sermon that night that despite the length of time, which should have tired everyone, his listeners, especially his dhutanga bhikkhu disciples, were held rapturously spellbound. Being totally absorbed in it, they were unaware of the passage of time and felt no bodily fatigue or stiffness. The dharma of his sermon seemed to penetrate throughout the three Worlds. In his sermon he referred to the 1,250 Arahant disciples who had come to see the Buddha without prior appointment.

'That day the recitation of the Patimokkha was done by the Buddha himself in the midst of the Noble Disciples, all of whom had attained to Full-final Attainment. This is unlike the day of the Patimokkha recitation today which is done in the midst of worldlings. It is a deplorable fact how we, the Buddha's disciples, who are also the Buddha's sons of the Sakyans, are so-called only by name and tradition, and not by the essential inward truth. In those times the Buddha's disciples were wholeheartedly truthful and thus they were able to realize the truth. In these times, however, we prefer only name, fame and recognition and like to be extolled to the skies despite the fact that there is nothing inside but falsehood which makes us immovable because of its weight and drag.

'Where is truth or purity to come from when whatever we have done or are doing is conducive mostly to the accumulation of defilements and evil, not to their reduction or removal? Under these circumstances, there is no hope for a recitation of the Patimokkha within, the gathering of Arahants. Merely donning the yellow robe cannot make a bhikkhu of a man, nor can name or fame be the sign of morality or dharma. The life of a bhikkhu or samanera must be devoted to following the dharma, which can be summarised as the not doing of any evil, the doing of only good, and purifying the mind. These are the three pillars of the Buddha's teaching.

'Not doing any evil must be correctly understood. It does not mean in deeds only, but also includes the not doing of any evil in words and, most importantly, in thought. A man may not do any evil in speech and deed, but if he still cherishes evil thoughts day and night, he can never expect to be moral or pure. His doing good is superficial and affected. What results is therefore contrary to appearances: inward trouble and distress in proportion to the evil thoughts cherished. This is the law of morality in the practical aspect for practicing Buddhists.'

He then explained meditation, wisdom and Deliverance in all aspects and degrees. It seems that no truths about them were withheld in the sermon. Throughout these four hours his listeners kept absolutely quiet, losing all sense of time and space in their absorption in the dharma so explicitly and impressively propounded. Towards the end of the sermon he told them that he would never deliver such a sermon again. His sermons after that were never as extensive or took as much time. One month later he fell ill and was steadily enfeebled until his passing away.

A Model of Endurance and Detachment from the Conditions of the Body

In spite of the weakening symptoms of his illness, however, his dhutanga observances were regularly kept. Going out for alms-food, eating within his alms-bowl and having only one meal a day were faithfully observed. When he was too weak to go round the village, he went halfway and then returned. Seeing his trouble, the lay devotees requested him not to go out, for they would come to offer food at his own place, but he refused. They then asked for a relaxation and brought food to the gateway of the hermitage to put in his bowl. He agreed to this proposal, reasoning that as long as he was able to get up and walk, so long would he do so. When later his physical strength failed him further, he still took pains, to go to the meeting-hall and received food offered there. Even when he was no longer able to walk, he still partook of his meal within his alms-bowl and was content with only one meal a day.

His disciples had to comply with his wishes and were all wonder struck at his strength of will which never weakened despite the failing strength of his body. He was really a model of the power of endurance, never giving way to any defilements, regardless of the condition of his body. Were we in the same position, there would have been a lot more trouble and confusion on our part and on those waiting on us. What is more important, we would not have known how much the defilements would have made fools of us the first day we were taken ill. Those who consider themselves the Venerable Acharn's disciples should often remind themselves of this episode of his life so that they may not be completely at the mercy of their own defilements.

He was sinking steadily and his disciples became increasingly worried. They took turns watching at night although they knew this could never have been kept a secret from him. One more worry was that he would forbid them to do so on the grounds that it would cause them unnecessary trouble. They arranged the night watches for three or four bhikkhus and samaneras at a time, each group staying under his kuti [sheltering place] for two or three hours, dusk to dawn. Later they begged him to allow them to watch in his kuti but outside his room. He kindly complied with their request, so they arranged for four bhikkhus and samaneras at a time, two sitting in meditation on the balcony of his kuti, and another two downstairs. Besides these regular watches, there were often other bhikkhus and samaneras peering from around the kuti day and night with concern.

His Order to Take Him Away

After the Retreat more and more of his disciples thronged from all directions to the village of Nong Phue to pay respects to him. The Venerable Acharn was steadily weakening, and one day he called a meeting of his close disciples and advised them what to do with his body.

'My hours are numbered,' he said. 'I have told you this several times, but I must tell you now that my death will not be like others'. It will involve many other people and therefore many animals as well. I do not want to die here. If I should die here, many many people will come. Many animals will then have to die because there isn't a market place near here. [The villagers would have to kill their animals just to feed those who would come there]. All of those animals would have to die because of me. From the day of my

ordination I have never thought of harming them, let alone killing them. I have always extended my loving-kindness to them, never neglecting to share with them all the fruits of my merit. It would be ironic if my death were to be the cause of their deaths.

'You have seen how even now so many people have thronged to this place. How many more will come after I die? You must take me out of this village to the town of Sakol Nakhorn. There are market places there where food can be easily obtained. My death will not be the cause of those animals' deaths as it would be if I remained here. I myself can die anywhere. I have realized the truth of how the elements making up the body will dissolve and return to where they came from, but it is out of concern for the lives of the animals here that I tell you I must not die here. There is still time to arrange things if you hurry, not to save my life, but to save those of the many animals here. Have any of you anything to suggest? '

His bhikkhus and lay devotees were silent. The atmosphere was heavy with grief and despair, and not one was able to utter a single word. 'Not to get what is desired is suffering' was now realized by all. Whether the Venerable Acharn stayed in the village or went to the town of Sakol Nakhorn, he would die.

All finally consented to his wish to be taken from the village, but not without much regret. All of the villagers had already made it known to all that they wanted the Venerable Acharn to die in their village, and that they would make all the arrangements necessary for his cremation, all this to the best of their ability, no matter how poor they were. In their unconditional devotion to him, they would never suffer anyone to take him away. They were all struck dumb when told of his reasons for it, but nevertheless, they obeyed him. Their devotion and sacrifices will long be remembered by the Venerable Acharn's other disciples.

His Departure

A stretcher was prepared on which to carry him to the town of Sakol Nakhorn. That day was the saddest day the people of Nong Phue ever experienced. They knew that it would be the last time they would be able to see their Venerable Acharn. Everyone who was able to walk was there to witness his departure. When he had partaken of his meal and stepped out the door, the eyes of these waiting for him there blurred with tears. When he was assisted by his disciples down to the stretcher and carried away, grief and lamentation swept through the crowd like the wind sweeping through a field of wheat. Everyone, the writer included, burst into tears, the people pitifully imploring him to come back to them, as if they were losing their most precious of jewels which they had lovingly treasured for five years.

There wasn't one person in the long line of people waiting to see him off who was not grief-stricken. Bhikkhus and samaneras, men, women and children - all were overwhelmed by sadness when they saw the stretcher carried along out of the village. The moment he left the hermitage his bhikkhu disciples could not help feeling that that place was deserted, with no signs of life whatsoever. The great tree under whose shade they had been peacefully living for years was being blown down by the merciless wind of Change. Hundreds of people walked silently and sadly after the stretcher, sending to him thoughts of love and concern. The villagers felt themselves forced to bid farewell to him even while he was still alive, knowing that his departure this time was one of no return.

It was about twenty-four kilometres from the village to the nearest district of Phanna Nikhom, yet all walked in silence paying no heed to distance or fatigue. They were seized with despair, knowing that every step was bringing them nearer to his departure. The Venerable Acharn himself appeared wonderfully calm despite the long distance and his worsened condition. He looked as though he were sleeping, but in fact he was still awake. When they arrived at a place with shady trees, they requested him to stop for a while so he could rest more comfortably. He then asked, 'Where are we now?' His voice sounded as if he were not ill at all, and this saddened them all the more.

'The Venerable Acharn is leaving me forever,' was the writer's thought at that moment. 'His unlimited kindness and purest heart is soon to be no more.' If it were possible for one to die for another, the writer would have been greatly delighted to die so that the Venerable Acharn could live. But then, the wind of Change has no mercy on any one.

The journey started from the village of Nong Phue at nine o'clock in the morning. The first leg of the journey was to take them to Wat Bahn Bhoo, in the district of Phanna Nikhom. After he had had a rest, his disciples then planned to take him to the town of Sakol Nakhorn.

They reached Wat Bahn Bhoo after seven o'clock in the evening. The journey took longer than it usually would have since they had to take a detour which encircled the foot of the mountains. There were also a number of aged people, both men and women, who took pains to follow him all the way. At the monastery he was carried to a small meeting-hall so that it would be convenient to attend upon him and also for the sake of bhikkhus and people who wished to see him.

Endless Throng of Visitors at Bahn Phoo

His condition worsened steadily. Bhikkhus and lay people came to see him in an endless stream from morning through to the evening and on into the night. All were eager to see him, who was known all over the region as an arahant. Without a good store of merit in the past one would never be able to see [and recognise] an arahant. With this thought in mind they all swarmed there to catch a glimpse of him. Such a glimpse would be much to their advantage in the future. Their lives as human beings would not have been wasted [to have seen and worshipped a living arahant].

On the following morning he urged them to take him to the town of Sakol Nakhorn, telling them to make haste, that he did not want to die in that district. One of his disciples, who was an Acharn, said he would like the Venerable Acharn to rest for a few more days. On each of the following days the Venerable Acharn told them to take him to the town, but they all gave him the same answer.

He rested in the district of Phanna Nokhom for about ten days and all the time urged his disciples to take him to the town several times a day. Sometimes they kept silent and at other times they answered him indirectly. Finally he confronted them, saying, 'Do you want me to die here? I told you I will go to the town!'

On the tenth night he refused to sleep and urgently called them to see him telling them he would not be able to live much longer and that they must take him to Sakol Nakhorn that night. He told them to support him to sit up in meditation-posture facing the town.

After emerging from meditation he told them to make haste. The senior bhikkhus were then called to see him and told him that in the morning everything would be ready since the car had not yet arrived there that evening. He insisted that they should do everything to make it as soon as possible since he could not remain alive for much longer.

'I do not want to go on with this suffering body,' he said. 'There is no use in prolonging its life. I have told you everything. Why do you still want to prolong its suffering? What's the use of this body when it ceases to live? If you do not obey me now, what hope will there be after I am gone? What Truth will you be able to seek in order to maintain the dharma after me?'

Having spoken thus, he refused to sleep that night despite his worsened condition. Perhaps he thought he might not wake up again should he let himself sleep. However, this is our own guess, which could be wrong.

To Sakol Nakhorn, the Place of His Complete Passing Away

The car arrived at seven o'clock from the Highway Department Unit of Sakol Nakhorn with Lady Noon Chuvanon [one of his close lay disciples] who came personally to invite him to the town. He asked whether there were enough cars for the bhikkhus and samaneras who wished to follow. She told him that the car would come back again to take as many bhikkhus and samaneras as would want to go. Having partaken of his meal, he was given an injection to enable him to rest while travelling and also to keep him from the effects of the bumpy ride. There was still no asphalt road from that district to the town, and so the road was pot-holed and strewn with pools of water all along the way. He was then invited to lie on the stretcher, which had to be carried from the monastery to the other side of the paddy field before reaching the car waiting for him there. He seemed to fall asleep about ten minutes after the injection. The car reached the town of Sakol Nakhorn at noon.

He was then taken from the car and carried up to a kuti in Wat Suddhavas where he remained asleep until waking up at midnight. At about one o'clock the signs of his departure were more obvious to all who were waiting round him. It was as if he were confirming to his disciples why he had often told them to make every possible haste in bringing him to the town, revealing to them the sufferings that the body had to undergo before the fire of life was put out by the wind of Change characteristic of all compounded and conditioned things. This was a good opportunity for those who, having seen it, were able to draw a dharma lesson from it.

It was quiet that night, extraordinarily quiet, when the Venerable Acharn was revealing to his disciples the truth of the Buddha's saying '*bhara have pancakkhandha*': The five aggregates are really a 'burden' - a burden that wise men are all glad to be relieved of. His bhikkhu disciples, headed by his eminence the Venerable Chao Khun Dhamma Cetiya of Wat Bodhi Somphorn in the town of Udorn Thani, were soon seen thronging to the place where he was lying. They were all calm in their manner but it was certain they were much troubled by the thought of their Venerable Acharn's departure, which was certain to be some time that night. They were seated in three lines, the first and closest being headed by his eminence the Venerable Chao Khun Dhamma Cetiya, the second by the other Acharns who were his disciples, and the third by other bhikkhus and samaneras. All gazed at their Venerable Acharn lying in front of them, their eyes often dimmed with tears of sadness and despair.

His Complete Passing Away

The Venerable Acharn lay in the Lion's posture [on his right side], but fearing that would tire him, one disciple pulled out a pillow that supported him leaving him lying on his back. The Venerable Acharn seemed to be conscious of this and tried to lie on his right side as before, but apparently he was too weak to do so. One Acharn, seeing this, moved the pillow forward a little to help him but he dared not do much, being afraid that it would make the Venerable Acharn too tired. Thus his final posture was somewhere between lying on his right side and lying on his back, because no one dared to do anything again for fear that it might disturb him. He was sinking fast now and all his disciples, with the lay devotees who were present, were filled with despair as they watched. His breaths grew steadily fainter until they stopped completely. No one knows the exact time he died. There was nothing in the movement of his body which indicated the exact minute of his departure. Some time later his eminence the Venerable Chao Khun Dhamma Cetiya exclaimed, 'He's passed away, hasn't he?' and looked at a watch. It was then 2:23 am, and this is regarded as the time of his passing away since the exact hour and minute could not be fixed.

When the news of his passing away was made known to all the disciples and lay devotees gathered there, they were all the more grief-stricken even though they were prepared for it. The Venerable Acharn was gone forever, to Absolute Security and Deliverance, freed from all worldly bondage, but they still had to suffer in the realms of Change and the Cycle of Re-births and Re-deaths.

Nature of the Worldling's Mind

It was agreed upon that the body of the Venerable Acharn should be left there for the time being, at least for one night. Arrangements for his funeral would be made in the morning. His disciples then returned to their places, some staying behind in the kuti where he passed away. The whole area around his kuti was lit with lamps, but to his disciples it was as if they were left in the dark. They did not know what to do or where to go as far as their practice was concerned. There were some who fainted when they learned of the news of his passing away. To them the loss of their Venerable Acharn was the loss of everything. The beacon that had illumined their path of practice was now extinguished. With it were gone the warmth and wisdom that had radiated from that light, together with the hope and the life based upon it.

This did not of course mean that the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha were forgotten, but worldlings' minds are inclined to cling first to what is nearest and most evident as the bridge linking them to what is farther away and less obvious, though deeper in influence. The service and the wisdom of their Venerable Acharn had been evident to them for many long years. His instructions had been regularly heard, his ability in solving their doubts and problems recognised, his person deeply revered, and his radiance of loving-kindness long felt and remembered.

It was some time after the Venerable Acharn's death that the writer suddenly realized that the Venerable Acharn, like the Buddha and his Noble Disciples, was well-gone, and that there was no need of continually thinking of him in this worldly way. What was a

matter for concern was the minds of those who mourned his passing away. Allowing themselves to be completely overcome by sadness would do them more harm than good. Never did the Venerable Acharn instruct anyone to cherish such thoughts and such sadness. Such thoughts are not evil, of course, yet they do not become a person in bhikkhu's robes, especially one who aspires to Full-final Attainment. The Buddha once said, 'Whoever sees the Dharma sees me; whoever sees me sees the Dharma.' A mind that is overcome by sadness *cannot* see the dharma. Only by following the Buddha's instruction and mode of practice will a mind be able to see both the dharma and the Buddha. If ever one should die from following such a practice, it would be a death far better than dying from a broken heart.

The news of the Venerable Acharn's death spread throughout the town of Sakol Nakhorn the following day. The senior bhikkhus and government officials in town came to pay their last respects to his body and consulted with one another about the funeral arrangements. All agreed that his funeral should be one befitting a most venerated Meditation Master, one well-known to almost everyone in all parts of Thailand. News of his death was to be made known via the mass media so that his disciples living in the various parts of the country would know of it and, if they so wished, come to attend the ceremony which was scheduled to take place in the third lunar month of Magha BE 2493 [CE 1950]. Large numbers of people came to Sakol Nakhorn to pay homage to his bodily remains up until the day of his cremation.

The Poorest of the Poor and the Richest of the Rich

In the latter part of his life, the Venerable Acharn was offered so many requisites as gifts that he was unable to make use of them all. Wherever he stayed, in the forests as well as in towns and villages, there were always devotees braving all kinds of hardships to offer him food and other requisites. The Venerable Acharn was in no way less sacrificing than his donors, always giving away whatever had been offered to him. In the early days of his practice, there was none more destitute than he, whereas in the latter days of his practice there was none richer. His receiving and giving were equal, but perhaps his giving was greater, whatever he received being given away before very long. It was his character to wish to help others and very often he would not make this wish known. If he wished to help a certain monastery, for example, he would simply go and stay there for a while. Whatever gifts he received he would give to that monastery.

At four o'clock in the afternoon of the day following his death, the bathing ceremony for his remains took place and was attended by many bhikkhus, samaneras and lay disciples. His body was then wrapped in a white shroud, over his robes, and placed in a specially built coffin, one side of which was glass so that those who had not been able to see him before he died would still have a chance to do so. Arrangements were then made for sermons and other rites to be held every night in his memory.

The Great People of Sakol Nakhorn

Throughout the three months before the cremation of the remains of the Venerable Acharn, the townspeople of Sakol Nakhorn demonstrated their spirit of co-operation and sacrifice in a most praiseworthy manner. Government officials, businessmen and the ordinary citizen, were all of one mind in helping those who came from afar in every

possible way. They seemed to be oblivious of the fatigue they felt or of the expenditures involved in welcoming and boarding them. The writer witnessed this great outpouring of co-operation and generosity, and he can truthfully say that he has never seen a more harmonious spirit than this with regards to preparations for a cremation.

Cremation Day

As the day of the Venerable Acharn's cremation drew nearer, the number of people coming to Wat Suddhavas steadily increased. It is estimated that on the day of his cremation there were some ten thousand people present. Booths and sheds of all shapes and sizes had been erected all over the area and food and drink were served freely to all. The forested area on the outskirts of Wat Suddhavas bloomed with the white umbrellas of the forest bhikkhus who had come there, a sight never dreamed of before. There were more than eight hundred bhikkhus and samaneras in Wat Suddhavas and an uncountable number of others in other monasteries nearby, perhaps more than one thousand. Great as the number of people was in that small area, there was almost no other sound to be heard except that of the loudspeakers telling the people about what was going on in the ceremony itself. There was absolutely no entertainment of any kind since it was the solemn occasion for the recollection of a Meditation Master, not one for fun or enjoyment.

Offerings given by devotees in his memory amounted to a small mountain. There were hundreds of sacks of rice, hundreds of other kinds of food and a quantity of robes that would have filled the godown of a cotton factory. It is inconceivable that the Thai people could have been so generous and selfless when it came to cherishing the memory of their Acharn. This makes them no less generous in giving help to other people as well. Small as Thailand is in size, the generosity of her people is hardly equalled by the people of any great country. This is the influence of Buddhism, which has taught them to be kind-hearted, tolerant and ready to give a helping hand whenever possible. These qualities of the Thai people can best be seen here during the cremation ceremony of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatto.

There was nothing that was found wanting. The pots and utensils for rice and other kinds of food were terrifying to look at because of their gigantic size, the largest sizes then available. Each of them was so big and heavy that one man was not able to lift, let alone carry, it. Two or more people were needed to move one from place to place.

Because of their unusually large numbers, bhikkhus and samaneras had to gather together in groups of thirty or forty, and fifty or sixty in order to have their meals, which they partook of in kutis, fields, sheds and other places. But despite their great number, it was wonderfully convenient for the lay disciples who offered and arranged their food, for most of them, about ninety per cent, were dhutanga bhikkhus, who ate only one meal a day and who ate only within one utensil, their own alms-bowl. This eliminated the need and the trouble for finding dishes, plates and trays. Only the pots and pans were offered and the bhikkhus helped themselves in dishing the contents into their own alms-bowls, in which all kinds of foods and desserts are mixed. The remaining ten percent were senior bhikkhus or elders of the Administration Units and their followers [for whom dishes, plates, cups, trays, and other utensils were needed and who generally had two meals a day].

Throughout this long period of three months, there were no crimes of violence, stealing, quarrelling, or drinking bouts. Those who had lost valuables were able to later recover

them by reporting to the authorities in the monastery area, who would make such a loss known via the loudspeakers. Before long, the lost article would find its way to the authorities who would then call the owners, who would be requested to describe the object in detail before being allowed to claim it.

The cremation ceremony itself lasted three nights and four days, beginning on the tenth day of the waxing moon of the third lunar month of Magha to midnight of the thirteenth day, which was the actual day of his cremation. His ashes were collected on the following morning.

The Miracle

The cremation pyre of the Venerable Acharn was built on the location where the Convocation Hall of Wat Suddhavas now stands. It was very beautifully built and decorated. Before his remains were removed to the pyre, on the eleventh day of waxing moon, all of his bhikkhu and lay disciples recited the passages asking for his forgiveness for any wrong they had knowingly or unknowingly done him. The atmosphere was heavy with grief and it soon gave way to one of lamentation, with many in tears and openly sobbing. All affectionately and reverently recollected his virtues and the help he had given them. The Venerable Acharn had left his body and had attained to Deliverance and Security from the Cycle of Rebirths and Redeaths. Never again would he come back to this 'vale of tears'. It was because of his kind instructions that they had come to know good and evil. They would never again hear him preach the dharma, and at the thought of this, they could not help being overcome by sorrow. Their tears were a token of the profound reverence and respect they had for him.

The time for the cremation had been set for midnight, but long before that time the people crowded around the pyre and waited patiently, all wanting to witness the cremation with their own eyes as something to be remembered for the rest of their lives. At the appointed time, however, something of a miracle happened, if the writer is permitted to call it such. The summer sky was bright and clear but it suddenly became overcast by a small cloud which hovered over only the cremation area. Just as the fire was lit and the flames leaped towards the coffin, the area was suddenly cooled by a drizzle which lasted for about fifteen minutes before the cloud disappeared, leaving the moonlit sky as bright and clear as before. This event was witnessed by the thousands of people present and was remembered by all.

Sandalwood Used as Firewood The Distribution of His Ashes

Ordinary firewood was not used in constructing the pyre. One of the Venerable Acharn's disciples ordered a sufficient quantity of fragrant sandalwood from the kingdom of Laos to be used instead, and to this was added a quantity of fragrant incense sticks. The results, however, were the same as that gotten from ordinary firewood - the body was consumed by the hungry flames.

The Venerable Acharn's ashes were collected at nine o'clock the following morning, and they were distributed to the bhikkhu delegates from the various towns who attended the ceremony so that they could be enshrined in places to be specially built. The lay disciples from the various towns also received a portion of his ashes. As soon as the

formal distribution of ashes had taken place, the other people present at the ceremony rushed to the remains of the pyre and gathered all the dust and cinders which remained. Not one grain of dust remained to be seen anywhere. All were overjoyed at the 'treasure' they had obtained and all regarded it as something priceless, pressing it to their bosoms with a triumphant smile.

The ceremony over and the ashes distributed, it was time to return home, but before doing so, all went to the cremation site and prostrated three times before it. It was the only sign of his presence. They sat there unmoving for a long while before getting up with tearful faces. This last farewell with tears of reverence and gratitude took many long hours, since when one group came away, another group went in and took its place. This was witnessed by the writer.

Mind Reigns Supreme in Progress and Regress

Looking deep into the cause that prompted the thousands of people to attend the Venerable Acharn's cremation ceremony, we shall see that it was nothing but mind: the Venerable Acharn's mind was pure and noble enough to draw them to him: their minds were developed enough to sense his benign attractive force. They realized that they were not yet able to be as pure as he was; nevertheless, they were sincere enough to know to whom they would turn for the help and instruction which would lead them along the right path. In this way, their birth as human beings was not wasted, they not having been shamelessly reborn in a sub-human realm, into which they should not condescend to enter at all. So great is the suffering in such realms - animals, hellish beings, hungry ghosts and demons - and so long is the period of submersion that it appears to be endless and without hope. With more births the mind seems to sink deeper due to distressing circumstances.

All these results - 'progress' to heavenly bliss, or 'regress' to untold miseries - are produced by [various conditions of] the mind. If the mind is conditioned by good or wholesome influences, it develops, grows and is blissful. If the mind falls victim to evil or unwholesome attractions, it inevitably moves towards decline, misery and despair. And in most cases, these effects are chain-like or continuous, with growth producing more growth and misery breeding more misery, both at present *and* in the future.

The Venerable Acharn is a source of wholesomeness producing bliss and security to all who realize his Noble Qualities and who are drawn to him because of them. He was blessed with all levels of wholesomeness, from the lowest to the highest, by which he had attained to parinirvana, the passing away of one who has done away with all defilements.

The Venerable Acharn was said by many to have attained to parinirvana, and the writer himself finds nothing to contradict this. He appreciates this greatest honor bestowed upon him as the mark of the people's highest veneration. From the writer's experience through many long years under his training and guidance, there can be found nothing to indicate that this is not so. So impressive was the dharma of his instruction that there is no doubt that his mind was dharma. A mind such as this is rare and is far apart from the mind of worldlings. It is only through self-development that a worldling can develop his mind and transform it to attain to that level. This mind is of itself immortal, beyond the limits of time. It is superior to all things provided it is conditioned by wholesomeness. If it is misguided, conditioned by unwholesomeness, it can be the greatest force bringing

about its own downfall and that of the world.

A Period of Depression and Crowded Loneliness

After the cremation, the Venerable Acharn's bhikkhu and samanera disciples felt confused and frustrated, felt themselves uprooted, not knowing where to go or what to do. They were like orphans, being quite lost in the dark. There was for a period no binding force among them, and they just couldn't help feeling crowded by loneliness. A competent Acharn is of the utmost importance, without whom a group, no matter how large, feels no security and lacks all vitality. It was a long time before his disciples were able to gather together and regain their strength of will. For them, the Venerable Acharn's death was a major upheaval. The loss of an able leader, whether of a family, society, business firm, government department or sangha group, always profoundly affects his subordinates, even if only for a time. If his subordinates or disciples are able to continue his work and assume his responsibilities, however, the group will not be much disturbed. One should always be well-prepared for the inevitable, whether one likes it or not.

The Venerable Acharn's disciples, bhikkhu and lay devotees alike, felt very empty and were for a time overcome by despair. The Venerable Acharn was to them what a foundation is to an edifice. Without its foundation, the superstructure, however magnificent, is rootless. The writer himself has deeply felt this and has realized the importance of disciples trying their utmost while the Master is still living. Failure in doing so results in decline and consequent decay after the Master is gone.

The writer's own mind was flooded by wave after wave of sadness and despair. 'My only Refuge is gone,' thought the writer. 'Who can I look up to from now on? Who can I turn to for help? The Venerable Acharn is well-gone, leaving me a breathing corpse. I am helpless now! This could be the end of everything. I am at the crucial stage in the battle between the defilements and the dharma. All hope for progress is now lost.'

Practicing Buddhists should constantly remind themselves not to be overconfident while their Master is still available, for it is only while he is still alive that they can benefit from his instructions and advice and thus attain to what they can in Buddhism. They can be millionaires in dharma, attaining to the levels of Path, Fruition and Nirvana, or they can be destitute, having thrown away this valuable opportunity, and remain poor in the midst of the treasure that could and should have been theirs.

The Venerable Acharn's Ashes Become Relics

Those who had been able to obtain the Venerable Acharn's ashes after the cremation took them back to their homes and enshrined them there, regarding them as objects of the highest veneration. In the four years that followed the cremation, nothing extraordinary happened.

Then, one day, a Mrs. Van Khamanamool went to the town of Sakol Nakhorn where the Venerable Acharn had died, to make merit in offering robes to bhikkhus outside of the Rains Retreat. She was given some ashes from a piece of burnt bone from the upper part of the Venerable Acharn's body by the Lord Abbot of Wat Suddhavas, where the Ven-

erable Acharn died and was cremated. She brought these ashes to her home, intending to put them in the urn which already contained ashes which she had received the day after the cremation of the Venerable Acharn took place. On opening the urn, she was struck dumb with wonder, for the ashes which she had previously received had all become relics [smooth and glossy grains, sand-like in appearance, resembling relics of the Buddha and some other arahant disciples in ancient times]. She had another urn containing his ashes which she kept in the hotel which she owned. She immediately went to the hotel and found that those ashes as well had become relics. In both urns there were all together three hundred and forty-four grains. Only the very finest of the ashes had remained as ashes, but these too later underwent the same transformation. This was the first known case of the Venerable Acharn's ashes becoming relics.

News of this spread far and wide. People thronged to her house to see this miracle and to ask for some of the relics for themselves. Mrs. Van Khamanamool was by nature a generous person and gladly gave away her relics to whoever asked for them. The writer himself had been given relics of the Venerable Acharn on two occasions, the first time five grains and the second time two. The writer couldn't help telling others of his good fortune in having been given his relics and was asked by many to produce them so that they could see them for themselves. The more often they were shown, the smaller their number became. Of those who saw, many could not help asking for them, and the writer could not help but give them away one by one until there wasn't one grain left. The writer was quite content in giving them away, even though it meant being deprived of them himself. Mrs. Van Khamanamool too had almost none left in her possession.

More and more incidents of the Venerable Acharn's ashes becoming relics were reported after this by whoever possessed them. Even today there are still occasional reports, but they are known mostly within the small circle of the owner's family and relatives. The reason such incidents are not widely known is because those who possess his relics are unwilling to share them with those who might ask for them if and when the news became common knowledge. Each regards his relics as the rarest of treasures. It is believed that anyone who does not have sufficient merit with regards to the Venerable Acharn will never possess his relics. Perhaps the writer should be included here as well, for having been given so many of his relics, he now has none left.

There are also stories of other wonders connected with the Venerable Acharn's relics. Two grains were reported to have become three, symbolic of the Triple Gem, in response to the possessor's earnest wish. In another case, one who possessed his relics, having learned of the above instance, also wanted his two grains to multiply, but instead of multiplying, they merged and became one! This person was very disappointed and came to see the writer for an explanation. The writer told him that those relics came from the same source. It didn't matter whether they were one, two, three or more in number. They therefore possessed the same holiness. That the two grains had merged into one was in itself a miracle. Of what use is there to wish for more?

The Venerable Acharn's hair, which was shaved once a fortnight, was also found to have become relics when enshrined in some place.

There is another case involving a senior government official who had been deeply impressed in the Venerable Acharn. He had been a great help to everyone during the preparations for the Venerable Acharn's cremation up until the day of the cremation itself. When the senior bhikkhu at Wat Suddhavas was offered some of the Venerable Acharn's relics by Mrs. Van Khamanamool, he naturally remembered this government

official and the great sacrifices he had made. One morning when this government official came to the Wat to pay respects to the senior bhikkhu, the senior bhikkhu gave him two of the relics he had received. This official hadn't prepared any receptacle, so he carefully placed them in a snuff bottle and put the bottle in his pocket. So overjoyed was he at his good fortune all that day that his mind was constantly fixed on the treasure in his pocket.

On reaching home that evening, he joyfully told the members of his family about his unexpected good fortune. An urn was brought out and the snuff bottle opened. This official was struck dumb with wonder for the two relics he had received that morning had become three! He told his family of the wonder of the relics, but his wife and children didn't believe him. They were certain that in his excitement he had miscounted them. He was sure that this was not the case and told them how impossible it would have been to miscount so small a number. He went on to tell them that if they didn't believe him he would gladly take them to see the bhikkhu the following morning. His family, however, insisted that they go and see the bhikkhu that very night! So off they went to the Wat to ask the bhikkhu how many relics he had given him that morning. The bhikkhu confirmed the fact that he had given him two relics and wanted to know if the official had lost one. The official turned to his wife and smiled, and then told the bhikkhu all that had happened.

The bhikkhu told them how rare an opportunity it was for a person to come across the relics of an arahant. He also told them to be careful in preserving them, i.e. to be always be well behaved and to establish themselves on the Path of Dharma. The relics had miraculously come and could just as miraculously go. For many people it is easy to believe in evil things, but difficult to believe in good ones. It is for this reason that there are so many evil persons in the world and so few good ones. Any impartial observation will reveal how even we ourselves are inclined to think evil rather than to think of dharma.

The government official and his wife were both delighted by his instruction and returned home overjoyed.

Why Ashes Become Relics

Many people have questioned why the ashes of the Venerable Phra Acharn Sao and the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun became relics. The body of an arahant and those of a worldling are similarly composed of the same ingredients, and as such, there shouldn't be any difference. One important factor must be kept in mind, however, and that is mind. Mind is the underlying factor which determines the difference. The level of development or the condition of the mind of an arahant and a worldling are far different from each other. The mind of an arahant is absolutely purified, whereas that of a worldling is defiled through the power of the defilements. The matter of the body is then transformed in accordance with the condition and nature of the mind. A purified mind can therefore purify the physical body in much the same way as a defiled mind can defile the body. The nature of the body can [to a certain extent] adapt itself to the nature of the mind. In other words, a Noble mind can beget a Noble body, and similarly, an ordinary mind can beget an ordinary body.

According to the writer's point of view, however, this process of body purification must take time. If a Noble Disciple lives long enough after his attainment of arahantship, then after his passing away and cremation, there is a greater probability that his ashes will

become relics. There would then be enough time for the body to eliminate its toxic ingredients during the purification process until the whole body with all of its different systems is purified. This process of purification is accomplished by the daily and regular withdrawal of the mind into the most profound depths of concentration - which is the best way to relax and to purify the body. If a Noble Disciple passes away not long after he has attained to arahantship, the writer is not quite certain about his ashes becoming relics. The body may not have completely undergone the purification process.

Noble Disciples can be divided into two groups, according to their methods of attainment. The first is called *dandabhinnya*. He is one whose progress towards attainment is gradual. He is one who has attained to the level of Non-returner, but who takes a long time before attaining to the path of arahantship. During this period his mind traverses back and forth between the path of Non-returner and that of arahant until a wide and deep experience is achieved in the various aspects of dharma. The body is therefore gradually purged of its toxic substances due to the frequent withdrawal of the mind into the profound depths of concentration. Mind and body therefore undergo the same purification process, each being correspondingly developed. The likelihood of the ashes of an arahant of this category becoming relics is greater. The second is called *khippabhinnya*. He is one whose attainment is 'sudden', taking little time, and he does not live long after his attainment. In a case such as this, there is little chance that his ashes will become relics.

Eminent Teacher of the Country's Development

The Venerable Acharn exerted a profoundly inspirational influence on the minds of both his bhikkhu and lay disciples when he was still alive, and that influence is still felt, even though he has passed away. He was known to have been a well-spring of hope for distressed minds and a fountain of cool water for minds engulfed by the fires of defilements. There had been those who were on the verge of committing some terrible evil and others who were about to commit a crime of violence because of the fire of anger and revenge. In the case of one man, he was within seconds of becoming a murderer when there appeared in his mind's eye an image of the Venerable Acharn. The fire of his defilement was smothered in an instant. Such people were thus convinced of their evil and wished they could have prostrated themselves then and there to pay homage to him as the one who had saved them from themselves.

It is extremely difficult to establish the minds of people on the Path of Dharma. All things of a secular nature have one thing in common: they are pleasing in that they all serve to feed the desires and fatten the ego. The results of mind-development are solely for the development of the mind, not for the feeding of the defilements. Mind-development concentrates on good and evil, right and wrong, all based on effects based on the mind, not on material returns. Mind-development is aimed at the security of the mind. This was always the aim of the Venerable Acharn's instruction and training. Those who had been under his guidance and who had listened to his instructions will testify to this fact with a sense of gratitude. There are many who are willing to follow and who are following his instructions and who would be willing to sacrifice their lives in doing so.

Mind-Development - the Foundation of Secular Development

Mind-development is the foundation of all development, both religious and secular. When the mind has been fully developed in the dharma, no evil can be expected of it at any time or any place. The results of whatever such a mind does can be relied upon. The society whose members' minds are developed is sure to be a healthy society. Such a development is well-rounded. People can live in bliss and peace. The society whose material development has outstripped its mental development is sure to experience turmoil, crimes of violence, corruption, cheating, etc. Such development is not balanced. Progress in the knowledge or the increase of gadgets for bodily comfort are but the increase of the fires that serve only to burn those who feed them. A world without mind-development is a world with foul things inside but with no system to eliminate its poisonous wastes. All thoughts and deeds arising from such a foul-smelling world are divorced from dharma and are against dharma. The wise man, realizing this important fact, does not fail to develop his mind first. He knows that all else is of secondary importance. With mind sufficiently developed and purified, rid of foul-smelling evils, all other things will follow suit. With individual minds purged of impurities, that society or world becomes cleansed, peaceful and ready for material development.

Wisdom divorced from dharma, however much it is developed, cannot be appreciated, honored or trusted. It may be wisdom developed to the point of bringing men to the stars, but if it is applied for aggressive or destructive purposes, it is to be called bestial rather than highly advanced. Wisdom for destructive purposes is essentially the wisdom of the animal world where might is right, where force reigns supreme, and where happiness comes from satisfying sadistic desires.

Wisdom developed in the way of dharma needs no certificate or document of recognition. The expression of such wisdom is always conducive to the welfare and happiness of oneself and as such it needs no certificate to guarantee its worth.

There have been many of secular worth who have been stealthily abused, but the results of such abuse are so obvious that it has become an open secret known to all. This is the result of overlooking the importance of mind-development, of allowing material development to outstrip that of the mind, the mind being left as polluted as before or even more so. The difference between mind-development and material development is vast, as far as the earth is from the sky.

There are many exciting, 'miraculous' powers which arise out of the development of concentration, such as mind-reading, etc. but the Buddha did not recommend their development. From the Buddhist point of view, the wise man is a virtuous man. The wise man expresses himself in words and deeds which benefit others in every possible way. The welfare and happiness of a society, of a world should be solidly based on the condition of the mind of each of its individual members. Living conditions may not be adequate, food may not be enough, but when the mind has learned to be detached from such oppressive circumstances, suffering, however great, will always be accepted, endured and then reduced to a tolerable degree.

Individual Maturity Results in Individual Receptivity

With his Full-final Attainment, the Venerable Acharn courageously and confidently proclaimed the dharma, both his insight and his experiences with invisible beings, paying no attention to belief or disbelief, praise or criticism. The dharma of his insight, from meditation and wisdom in all its many levels, and to deliverance and nirvana, was

thoroughly explained with self-confidence. It lay with his listeners how much of it they would be able to understand and how far they would be able to follow him. His innumerable experiences with celestial beings, demons, ghosts, and other kinds of invisible beings were also courageously related. Whether or not his listeners would be impressed, and just how much, depended on their own receptivity. Those with similar inclinations were sure to gain much from what he said.

Truthfulness Is an Angelic Virtue

It was not uncommon for the Venerable Acharn to have to receive several groups of angels coming to him for sermons. On one occasion he was tired and would like to have had a rest. When more groups of angels came to see him, he requested them to go and see one of his bhikkhu disciples who also had the ability to communicate with them. They went to see that bhikkhu who gave them a sermon in response to their request. The following morning that bhikkhu came to see the Venerable Acharn and told him what had happened the previous night. The Venerable Acharn told him that what had happened was true.

'Celestial beings, unlike human beings, are true to their word. Truthfulness is the angelic beings' principal virtue. They never tell lies or break promises. In all my long experiences with them,' he said, 'I have never known one of them to tell a lie or to break a promise. Once they had given their word that they would come at such and such a time, they were sure to come. They preserve truthfulness as carefully as they preserve their lives. They strongly criticize any breach of promise, and such a breach is not forgiven without a reasonable excuse. They have even criticized me for having withdrawn into the depths of profound meditation beyond the appointed time. They had had to wait for some time before I emerged to the level of concentration where communication could take place. I told them that because of my physical make-up it was necessary to have a period of rest, that it could not be dispensed with. This they understood.

'I told them that I was only one bhikkhu and that there were hundreds of thousands of them, both from the higher realms and from the earth, all coming to see that one bhikkhu, me! Who would have been able to have pleased all of them all the time without being tired? Considering my physical make-up, they should have been more tolerant of such a slight oversight which was unwittingly committed. If I was to be criticized for such as this, then I would be content with my blissful peace and not trouble myself with receiving them anymore. They understood this and asked my pardon. Instances such as this usually occurred with newcomers who were not well acquainted with me. Those who had known me and who knew enough about my body sympathized with me and were ready to tolerate slight tardiness.'

Various Depths of Truthfulness

'These angels also felt uneasy when they knew that I had been resting in deep meditation and had had to emerge from it just to receive them, because I was obviously being much troubled. I told them that I valued truthfulness more than my life, even more so than did the angelic beings. That I was sometimes a little late in receiving them was because of my truthfulness to the dharma, which is far greater than truthfulness to angelic beings. Subtle as the bodies of the angels may be, including those of the most

subtle realm, my truthfulness to the dharma and my mind are far more subtle than that. Yet I had never mentioned this to them because I did not want to boast about my own qualities. Telling them all this was necessary so that they would understand my position and the dharma I preserve, and so that they would not impulsively criticize me again.

'After I had told them all this,' the Venerable Acharn continued, 'they were much afraid of the unwholesome results which might accrue to them and asked for my forgiveness. I told them that it was never my wish to sow the seeds of harmfulness or evil on anyone, visible or invisible, high or low, man or animal. I have always extended my loving-kindness to all beings everywhere. Every moment of my mind and every movement of my body has been based on the dharma of Absolute Purity. I told these angels that they had only meritorious intention and mundane truthfulness, and that these are no match for the virtues of the Buddha and his Noble Disciples, who are all endowed with the Absolute Purity of truthfulness, dharma and mind. This condition is more wonderful than any worldling can imagine, and it is far beyond his capacity, to even conceive of it correctly. The only way to know it is to realize it firsthand. There is no question as to whether I have attained to that realization or not. What need is there to boast about it now?'

The Venerable Acharn said that if these angels were human beings, they would very likely have been embarrassed at and become depressed over what he had said, but in this case they appeared to be profoundly convinced of their own fault and self-delusion and listened to his sermon more attentively. They did not cherish any ill-will towards him. Beings such as these can truly be called 'advanced'.

The Unknown vs the Unknowable

The above are instances of what to ordinary people appear to be unknowable. Such beings, being invisible, just do not, cannot, exist. Full-final Attainment is considered in the same way. Because they have not realized it, experienced it, themselves, it is something which is impossible to attain to. But to the Buddha and his Noble Disciples, Full-final Attainment is something knowable. It is nothing mysterious. Communication with invisible beings is only unknown to some people, but not unknowable to all. This was true in the time of the Buddha and is still true at present. Such things are unknown to those who are not in a Position to know, but are knowable to those who have equipped themselves with the means by which to know. Belief in or protests against such things will not make them any clearer. These incidents are therefore recorded here, partly from the information gained from some of the Venerable Acharn's disciples and from the writer's wholehearted faith in and devotion to the Venerable Acharn. Should there be anyone come and ask the writer to die this very moment so that the Venerable Acharn might return to life and so preach the dharma of his Attainment once again to the people, there would not be the slightest hesitation to comply with his wish. People would benefit more from the Venerable Acharn's direct instructions than from the writer's record of his life. There were many things which the Venerable Acharn related but which are not included in these pages because of the writer's poor receptivity. Whatever is written here is what remains in the conscious mind.

The Acharn Venerable was the one who had made these things known to some of his disciples, all of whom have confirmed his experiences and Attainment, as well as one another's. This is like the Noble Disciples who were witnesses of the Buddha's Enlightenment as well as one another's Attainment in following the dharma. This may

serve as some sort of confirmation of the fact that what is unknown to some does not always mean that it is unknowable.

Case of a Slippery Mind

While the Venerable Acharn was staying in the village of Nong Phue, there was an old white-robed laywoman disciple who was profoundly impressed in him and who came to see him to ask him about an experience she had had in meditation the previous night. She said that while she was sitting in meditation, her mind became one-pointed, there being nothing in her 'vision', everything being blank. While contemplating this state, to her surprise, she saw what appeared to be a fine delicate thread running out of her own body and mind. She decided to follow it because she wanted to know where it went and why. She soon discovered that this thread ran from her own mind to the womb of her niece whom she loved very dearly and who lived in the same village, and this despite the fact that this old woman hadn't died yet. She became very frightened and emerged from her meditation. She also knew that her niece at that time was one month pregnant. Feeling very unsettled by this experience, she hurried off to relate this incident to the Venerable Acharn and to ask his advice. The gathering of his disciples breathlessly awaited his reply.

The Venerable Acharn closed his eyes in meditation for several minutes and then told her that the next time she sat in meditation and saw that thread reaching out, she should determine to sever it by means of the power of wisdom. This determination, however, had to be firm and unshakable, not half-hearted or perfunctory. Otherwise, after her death, she would take birth in the womb of her own niece to whom her mind had been all that time attracted. She returned home and two days later came to see the Venerable Acharn with a happy smile revealing that she had successfully followed the Venerable Acharn's advice. She had cut the thread of her own mind with absolute determination while it was again reaching out to her niece. The next night she had again sat in meditation, as usual, and tried to see if the thread were still there, but she found no trace of it.

The Venerable Acharn said, 'You can now see how subtle and stealthy the mind is in its workings, which can be detected only in meditation. You almost fell victim to the slippery, eel-like action of your own mind, which would have sent you to the womb of your niece. Your meditation saved you.'

Meanwhile, with the thread severed, the pregnant girl aborted.

Other disciples soon heard about this strange incident and, being quite puzzled, wanted to know why a person who was still alive should be able to take birth in the womb of another. The Venerable Acharn told them that this was possible because the pregnancy was still in its early stages, that there wasn't an actual birth as yet. Had the old woman not detected this subtle feat her own [subconscious] mind was performing, then she would most certainly have [died and] taken birth in the womb of her own niece.

The question naturally arose as to whether or not severing the connecting thread between the old woman and the womb of her niece could be considered killing. The Venerable Acharn explained that the severing had been accomplished only through mental action, not by means of any material weapon. The body and mind of the old woman always remained as such [and at the same time, the life developing in the

womb was not yet developed to the point where it could be called 'human']⁴⁰.

The Venerable Acharn accepted the truth of what this old woman had said, for in no way did he contradict her story. Such an occurrence may thus be considered as true. In further support of this is the fact that this old woman loved her niece very much, always looking after her with loving care, little thinking that her own [subconscious] mind would 'slip out' and prepare the place for her next birth even before she had actually died. Had she not followed the Venerable Acharn's advice and severed the thread, she would have [died soon and] then become the daughter of her own niece.

It was for this reason that the Venerable Acharn said that the feats and mechanisms of a person's mind are subtle and slippery, and that without its development through meditation, there would be no hope to safeguard it against those slippery, fleeting actions that would unwittingly harm that person, both before and after death. Mind-development for a person's welfare and security is therefore of vital importance. This is especially true at the critical moment of death, when the body dissolves, when only well developed mindfulness-and-wisdom can safeguard the mind against physical suffering and pain, and then determine its forthcoming plane of consciousness. Success or failure at this moment of the dissolving body will mean another birth or life enjoyed or wasted.

If one obtains birth in the animal world, for instance, the period equal to the life-span of that animal is wasted, and the miserable conditions characteristic of that animal have to be endured. But if mindfulness and-wisdom are present at the moment of death, then, at the least, another birth as a human being is obtained, and in other cases, birth in a celestial plane may be won, where a long time is spent before coming back to the human world.

Even as a human being, the mind is still drawn to the merit and morality previously accumulated. These are later replenished with more merit and further development of morality until the mind is mature enough.

In a case such as this, death is but a transition of body, from the lower to the higher, from the shorter to the longer [lifespan], the crude to the subtle, and from more births to fewer to no birth at all. The Buddha underwent this process, as did his Noble Disciples, who changed their planes of becoming, planes of existence and experiences until there was no longer any need for change. The mind was steadily developed until nirvana was realized. It is for this reason that wise men are never discouraged in accumulating merit, trying to implant into their minds whatever wholesome thoughts and deeds are possible at all times and in all places.

⁴⁰ The Mahanidanasutta of the Mahavagga of the Long Sayings Section gives scriptural support for this as follows:

"Ananda, should Consciousness not come over to take birth in the mother's womb, could there be name-and-form (i.e. body-and-mind of a new born baby) in the mother's womb? "

"No, Lord, there could not be."

"Should Consciousness after coming over to take birth in the mother's womb leave it thereafter, could there be name-and-form developing in the mother's womb?"

"No Lord, there could not be."

Even so, Ananda, Consciousness is said to be the origin, the prime mover, the cause of name-and-form."

A Serpent-King Leaves His Tracks

Another interesting event took place in the village of Nong Phue. One morning, when the Venerable Acharn emerged from his meditation and came out of his hut, he suddenly told his bhikkhu disciples to go and see the tracks left by a great serpent. He told them that the previous night a serpent-king had come to listen to his sermon and that he had asked him to leave some tracks before he departed so that his bhikkhus and samaneras could see them in the morning. They went and looked and told him that there were tracks seemingly beginning out of nowhere near the edge of the forest and running to under his hut. The tracks looked like those belonging to a very large snake. The clearing around the Venerable Acharn's hut was covered with sand and the tracks were quite clear, which confirmed what the Venerable Acharn had said.

His Manifold Insight

Another strange incident demonstrated the Venerable Acharn's ability to know that which was beyond what was known to ordinary human beings.

A bhikkhu had often seen the Venerable Acharn smoking Cock Brand cigarettes. He concluded that the Venerable Acharn must like to smoke that particular brand and asked his patron [a lay disciple supplying necessary things for him] to fetch a pack which he then offered to the Venerable Acharn. The Venerable Acharn was engaged in a dharma discussion at the time and when that bhikkhu offered him the cigarettes, he received them and then put them to one side, meanwhile continuing his discussion. When that bhikkhu went to see the Venerable Acharn the following morning, he gave him back the pack of cigarettes, saying that he couldn't smoke them since they belonged to many individuals who had not all given their permission. That bhikkhu told the Venerable Acharn that the cigarettes belonged to him alone as he had asked his patron to fetch them especially for the Venerable Acharn. Despite this, the Venerable Acharn insisted that he couldn't smoke them because not all of its owners had given their permission.

Fearing lest he be reprimanded if he protested further, that bhikkhu had to take back the cigarettes. He then went to see his patron and asked him how he had obtained that pack of cigarettes. His patron told him he had bought them with money, some of which belonged to some other bhikkhus. Hearing this, the bhikkhu realized that the Venerable Acharn was right and that he himself was wrong. He asked who those other bhikkhus were and then went to see them to secure their permission which they gladly gave. He then returned to the Venerable Acharn and told him that he had been wrong and that all the owners had now given their permission. He offered them to the Venerable Acharn once again, which he accepted without comment.

Some time later this bhikkhu recalled this incident when talking with a group of his bhikkhu friends. One bhikkhu was surprised at this, but another was not. He told this group that it was because of the Venerable Acharn's abilities such as this that he was here under his training. He told them that he was by nature very stubborn and that he and his defilements often challenged his other Acharns but that such things were now powerless against the Venerable Acharn. He told them that since having come to stay with the Venerable Acharn he was able to keep his defilements under strict control, it seeming sometimes as if there were no defilements present at all. He told them that this

knowledge of the cigarettes was nothing compared to the Venerable Acharn's other abilities.

'The worldling's mind is stubborn,' he said. 'It dreads the fire only when it is being burned. But when the pain is gone, it just can't help playing with that self-same fire again. The mind is more mischievous and restless than hundreds of monkeys. And what is worse, it can harden itself to the voice of conscience and seemingly be immune to the effects of evil. It is because of this that I cannot leave the Venerable Acharn, because I cannot trust myself. Under his scrutinizing eye my mind is forced to be obedient, and it is then more effectively controlled. Any slip is readily checked and a fall prevented. I am stubborn and need nothing more than his rigid discipline and harsh treatment.'

Testing the Venerable Acharn's Mind-Reading Ability

That bhikkhu continued with the story of when he had first come to stay with the Venerable Acharn and what he had done.

'It was well-known to all who stayed with him that the Venerable Acharn possessed some supernatural powers, one of which was mind-reading. I wanted to know if this were really true and toyed with the idea of testing him. I thought that if he somehow indicated that he knew what I was thinking of at that moment I would be satisfied. I would devote my whole life to him if he were able to do so.

'That evening I went to see the Venerable Acharn and I began to feel very uneasy in his presence. This was very unusual for I had never felt uneasy in his presence before. Then I noticed that he was staring at me in a very unusual manner. It looked as though he were pointing a finger at me and shouting my thoughts in my ears. He had begun his sermon but I hardly heard a word. My mind was being consumed by feelings of guilt. Before long it seemed as though his words had become whips and were lashing threateningly behind me, drawing nearer and nearer. At times it felt as though it were my heart which was being whipped. I couldn't help swaying from side to side. Finally I could endure it no longer. In my mind I begged his forgiveness. In my mind I told him that I was only curious, that I had no intention to really test his ability. I wanted to be accepted as his disciple once again and offer him my life. The tone of his sermon grew milder and then the warning: "Look inward into your own faults and failings. It's no use finding out others' successes and weaknesses without developing or correcting oneself. Just knowing that other people have achieved success is of no use to us, because we still stay where we are. We haven't made any effort towards that success ourselves. You must know your own strengths and weaknesses in all respects before attempting to know of others. There is no point to 'testing' others [only out of curiosity]."

'When this sermon was finished, I was drenched with sweat. It was also the moment of my unconditional surrender to him. I have never entertained such thoughts about him since.'

Special abilities may differ in both kind and degree, but the dharma which leads to the realization of nirvana is always the same as that which the Buddha himself realized. Any aspirant is entitled to realize the truth in proportion to his own degree of truthfulness.

Phra Acharn Chob's Adventure with Tigers

The following accounts concern an Acharn whom the writer highly admires and venerates. His name is Phra Acharn Chob, who is now in his seventies. He has been ordained for a long time and he usually prefers staying in the seclusion of the forests. Whenever he went anywhere, it was his habit to travel at night, and he therefore frequently encountered the animals whose habit it was to roam about at night, such as tigers.

Phra Acharn Chob wanted to go to the North near Chiangmai and Lampang, and so one afternoon he set out in that direction from where he was staying in the district of Lomsak in the town of Petchaboon. He was approaching Dong Luang [the Great Forest] when he met some villagers who advised him to first break his journey in their village before continuing on through the forest. Being sincerely concerned for his safety, they told him that this forest was vast, and if he entered it in the afternoon, night would catch him there. This forest abounded in ferocious tigers who would then more than likely attack him. Many travellers before him had fallen victim to the tigers when they spent the night in the forest. They therefore invited him to their village where he could safely pass the night. They would offer him alms-food the following morning, after which he could safely continue on his way.

Despite their advice and concern for him, Phra Acharn Chob insisted on going. The villagers asked him if he was afraid of tigers and he told them that he was, but that he would go anyway. He told them that if he became a tiger's meal, then that was his karma. He then bade them farewell and entered the Great Forest. He had not gone far when he came across tiger tracks, urine and excrement, fresh and old, everywhere. On seeing these tracks, he fixed his mind on his recitation.

When night fell, he had reached the middle of the Great Forest. Suddenly the simultaneous roars of two great tigers rent the air, one approaching from ahead and the other from behind. The nearer they came, the more deafening their roars. Both seemed intent on making a meal of him. One of the tigers then appeared in the trail about two meters ahead of him, and on glancing behind, there was the other one about the same distance away. They were huge, the biggest he had ever seen. Phra Acharn Chob had no choice but to stand still, being quite sure that this was the end of him. He couldn't say he wasn't afraid, but it is possible that he was so afraid that he wasn't consciously aware of it. He stood rooted to the ground he was standing on, but at that critical moment, mindfulness came to his rescue. Committing his body to the tigers, he determined not to abandon his mindfulness. His mind withdrew from the tigers and dwelt within, becoming one-pointed. He knew at the same time that the tigers could never do him any harm. In another instant he was oblivious to the tigers, his body and position, everything. His mind withdrew completely into the base of meditation and remained there for several hours. When he emerged once again, he found himself standing as before, his klod on one shoulder and his alms-bowl in its sling across the other, his travelling lantern still in his hand but the candle long since gone out. He lit another candle, but no tigers were to be seen. The forest was quiet.

Phra Acharn Chob was very much surprised that he was still in one piece, untouched and unharmed by the tigers. His mind was filled with courage and he felt as though he would be able to face a hundred or even a thousand tigers now that he knew the power of the mind protected by dharma. He felt great love for the two tigers, who were really friends in disguise, for having 'lifted' him to the dharma and for helping

him to realize its wonders. He knew that instead of fearing them he had to thank them and be grateful to them. Being convinced of the power of the dharma, which is supreme in the Three Realms, he continued on his way, overjoyed by his discovery. He made walking the theme of his meditation, recalling both of his tiger friends with a sense of gratitude. He felt certain that should he see them again, and should they allow him to, he would certainly be able to walk right up to them and lovingly stroke their heads.

He walked on, bathed in ecstatic joy, until dawn, but he still had not reached the edge of the Great Forest. It wasn't until nine o'clock that morning that he finally reached the village just on the edge of the forest. The sight of him coming out of the forest at that time of day greatly surprised the villagers, who thronged out of their homes to offer him aims-food and to ask him how he had managed to come through the Great Forest unharmed after spending a night there. Phra Acharn Chob told them that he had walked all night because he liked secluded places when he travelled. They were both alarmed and surprised and asked him if he had met any tigers on the way. He told them that he had seen some, but that they hadn't harmed him in any way. The villagers at first found this very difficult to believe, but the fact that he had just come out of the forest after spending a night there and was now standing in front of them was proof of what he said.

Why Acharn Chob survived his encounter with the tigers and why he had taken the correct path through the forest without becoming lost, as had happened to so many before him, are questions to be pondered. The power of the dharma is wonderful. This incident involving Phra Acharn Chob may be useful to all who are travelling through the forests of life, for whom the dharma is no less necessary to safeguard against falling into wrong and harmful ways on their long journey.

Phra Acharn Chob's Adventure in Burma A Tiger Bodyguard

Phra Acharn Chob was in Burma on one of his wanderings when he had another encounter with a tiger. He was then dwelling in a mountain cave developing his meditation, and he was often visited by tigers, none of which ever harmed him.

One afternoon, about five o'clock, he was sitting in meditation in the cave as he usually did. On finishing his meditation, he opened his eyes and found himself face to face with a great tiger standing in the mouth of the cave. Perhaps because of his frequent encounters with the tigers in the area, he wasn't afraid of this one. Both looked at each other with indifference. The tiger glanced this way and that for a few moments and then quite casually leaped up on a flat rock near the mouth of the cave. There it started to clean itself, licking its huge paws, as if it were all alone there. After cleaning itself, it settled down comfortably on the rock. Although he had no conscious fear of the tiger, yet Phra Acharn Chob admitted that he was unable to do his walking meditation at the mouth of the cave as usual. It was too close to the rock on which the tiger was now relaxing. He couldn't help feeling somewhat uneasy, so he continued his sitting meditation where he was.

Every once in a while the tiger would glance at him in a 'friendly' way. It was a simple glance, quite casual, without much attentiveness in it. It seemed to be greatly enjoying itself on its rocky bed. At first Phra Acharn Chob thought that it wouldn't stay there for very long, but to his great disappointment, it looked as though friend tiger were thinking

of taking up permanent residency there.

With the coming of dusk, Phra Acharn Chob lit a candle and watched the tiger's reaction to the light. There was none! So, he hung his mosquito net over his klod and sat meditating within it until it was time to rest. He awoke about three o'clock in the morning, put away his mosquito net and lit a candle. Friend tiger was still lying there as comfortably and indifferently as ever! When, it came time for him to go for alms-food, it was obvious that Phra Acharn Chob would have to walk by his 'bodyguard's' bed. Knowing that he would have to pass within one meter of the tiger, he became suspect of exactly what it might do to him as he walked by to go out of the cave. While robing himself, he stole a sidelong glance at the tiger and found that it was watching him, his eyes soft, much as a dog would watch its master. Before beginning to walk out, Phra Acharn Chob spoke to the tiger.

'My friend, it's time for me to go on my alms-round. I need food to sustain my body, as do animals and other people. Please allow me to leave. You may stay here or go out for your own food, as you wish.' The tiger seemed to be listening to him, eyes gentle and attentive. He then started towards the mouth of the cave, passing directly in front of the rock. All this time the tiger watched him, looking as if it were saying, 'Please go, my master, there's no need to fear. I've come here just to give you protection.'

Phra Acharn Chob went into the village for alms-food, but he didn't tell anyone about his guardian back at the cave, fearing lest it would upset the villagers. When he returned to the cave, the tiger was nowhere to be seen, and it didn't return again while he stayed there. Phra Acharn Chob thought that it might have been an angelic being who had assumed the form of a tiger. It looked to be a surprisingly gentle animal, never once having made any sort of threatening movement while it lay there. Phra Acharn Chob said that for many days after that he sent his loving-kindness to that tiger, expecting it to return, but it did not. In the silence of the nights that followed he often heard the roars of the tigers in the area, but he didn't know if one of them was his bodyguard or not. That region abounded in tigers and was a terrible place for those who were afraid of them.

As for Phra Acharn Chob, the day his bodyguard lolled comfortably at the mouth of his cave was a day of encouragement and served to considerably strengthen his faith in the dharma.

Alms-food Offered by an Angelic Being

Phra Acharn Chob stayed in Burma for five years and was able to speak Burmese fluently. He was forced to return to Thailand when Burma was overrun by both the Japanese and the English during World War Two. Every nook and cranny of the towns, forests and mountains was searched by them. The English harbored a strong hatred for the Thai in particular because Thailand was then Japan's ally. All the Thai people that they met - men, women, and even monks - were slaughtered without exception. The Burmese people in the village where he was staying, however, were greatly impressed in him, and seeing that the English soldiers were becoming more and more intrusive, they became very concerned for his safety and agreed to move him to a secret place in the mountains which they were certain the soldiers would never be able to find.

These people were later disappointed, for one day the English soldiers did find him out while he was reciting the blessing passages for the people. The villagers turned pale with

fear on seeing the soldiers there in their secret hideaway, but they managed to tell them that Phra Acharn Chob was a monk and therefore had nothing to do with war, that he had also been in Burma long before the war broke out and was highly venerated by the people, that to harm him would be equivalent to harming the Burmese people themselves. Seeing that the villagers were strongly opposed to what the soldiers intended to do, the soldiers talked amongst themselves for about half an hour. They agreed to spare his life, but told the people that they had better move him to another place, otherwise another group of soldiers may stumble upon him who would not be so willing to comply with their request. As for Phra Acharn Chob, all this time he was radiating his loving-kindness and recollecting the virtues of the Triple Gem while the soldiers glanced at him menacingly. After the soldiers left, the villagers quickly took him to a more remote mountain and asked him not to come to them for alms-food, that they would arrange to have it secretly taken to him.

On the days that followed, more and more groups of soldiers, sometimes several in one day, came to the village, all hunting for him. The villagers became more and more fearful that they would soon discover his hiding place and then kill him. There seemed to be no other choice but to send him back to Thailand. The villagers went to him and led him to a secret forest trail which was unknown to the soldiers, and which they said would eventually take him to Thailand. They gave him detailed descriptions of the trail, its direction, and the topography of the region he would have to pass through. They told him not to stray from the trail, no matter how rough or wild it might become, because it was a secret way used by the forest dwellers to travel between Burma and Thailand. Phra Acharn Chob bade farewell to the kind-hearted villagers and quickly set out on his long and dangerous journey.

He walked day and night without stopping to sleep, and without eating [as a bhikkhu, he could not carry any food with him], having only some water to drink. For three days and nights he continued his journey on foot in that wild and desolate region, climbing one mountain after another, and coming across the tracks of the various kinds of animals, such as tigers and elephant, which abounded in that region. Besides the ever-present danger of being suddenly attacked by these animals, there was always the chance of him losing his way and perishing there.

On the morning of the fourth day, he was staggering down a mountainside, exhausted from hunger and fatigue, certain that he would die there. He had been walking for three days and three nights without food and without sleep. He hadn't once come across a human dwelling where he might have obtained alms-food. He thought of the irony of it all - he who had escaped the ravages of war between countries might quite possibly succumb to the ravages of hunger and fatigue in the seclusion of the forests he loved so well.

He then thought of the angelic beings mentioned by the Buddha as possessing the powers of clairvoyance and clairaudience. 'Aren't they aware that the chances of this bhikkhu starving to death are very great?' he thought to himself. 'Many of them must have gained great benefit from bhikkhus' instructions, both at the time of the Buddha and in the present day. Won't they offer any help to a bhikkhu in distress?'⁴¹

Not long after that, while he was staggering helplessly along the trail, he saw a gentleman beautifully dressed in a style not characteristic of that of the forest dweller. He

⁴¹ Phra Acharn Chob himself said that at some time in the past there had been some sort of a connection between himself and angelic beings. The author.

was seated by the side of the trail holding a tray of alms-food over his head [in the manner devotees usually do before presenting it to a bhikkhu]. This gentleman seemed to have come from nowhere. The thought of this made the hair of Phra Acharn Chob stand on end in surprise. Hunger and fatigue disappeared.

The gentleman politely invited him to stop and rest for a while. He had alms-food, he said, and after he had had his meal he could continue on his journey. He said that Phra Acharn Chob would reach the end of that forest before that day was out.

Phra Acharn Chob stopped, unburdened himself of his requisites and readied his alms-bowl to receive the food that was to be offered. All that was put into his alms-bowl smelled sweet and fragrant. Phra Acharn Chob then asked the gentleman where he had come from, since he had been travelling for three days and nights and had never once come across a human dwelling. The gentleman pointed slightly skywards and said that he lived there. When Phra Acharn Chob asked him how he knew a bhikkhu was passing that way, the gentleman only smiled and said nothing. Phra Acharn Chob then recited the blessing passages, and when they were ended, the gentleman took leave of him, bidding him farewell, telling him that his house was quite some distance away.

The gentleman was uncommonly quiet and quite dignified in his manner and appearance. He was middle-aged, of medium stature, his complexion bright and his movements controlled. He then stood and walked behind a tree which was growing near there. Phra Acharn Chob watched him with great curiosity, thinking that he would soon reappear at the other side of the tree, but, much to his surprise, he did not! Phra Acharn Chob got up and went to the tree to have a look and found no one anywhere near there! He then went back to his alms-bowl and readied himself to partake of his meal. All the food in his bowl exactly met the requirements of his physical needs. Nutrition seemed to instantly course through his body, filling him with strength and vitality. The amount of the food was also exactly what was required, there being neither too much nor too little. Had there been anymore, he would not have been able to have finished it.

Phra Acharn Chob then continued his journey, being refreshed with newfound strength and courage. He couldn't help but wonder about the strange gentleman, forgetting all else as he followed the trail. Late that afternoon he found himself leaving the forest, just as the gentleman had said, and shortly thereafter, he once again set foot in Thailand. All traces of the trials he encountered on his long and dangerous journey disappeared.

Phra Acharn Chob later said that this strange gentleman was none other than an angelic being who had come in response to his earliest plea. His appearance and manner strongly supported this, as did the fact that he never encountered any human habitation all the while he was in the forest. The very fact that he had survived at all is quite miraculous. Perhaps it was because the angelic beings in that forest were protecting him, or perhaps it was the protective power of the dharma, or both.

The Burmese villagers he had left behind were greatly concerned about him, being very much afraid that he would perish on the way, but there was nothing else which they could have done. They knew that the longer he stayed with them, the greater the risk of his being detected and then killed by the English. They knew that the chances of his surviving such a journey were slim, but that such a chance was worth the taking, it being better than just waiting to be slaughtered there.

The above accounts of some of the adventures of Phra Acharn Chob are brief. Like his

meditation master Phra Acharn Mun, he preferred spending his life in the seclusion of the forests and mountains, dwelling alone. What has been recorded here is what he himself narrated. The readers are free to comment upon it themselves.

Relationship Between the Venerable Acharn and His Disciples

This preference of living in the forests and mountains is more or less a common characteristic of the Venerable Acharn's disciples. It is a well-known fact that the Venerable Acharn himself recommended this dwelling alone in the forests, and often said that whatever dharma he had realized, crude or subtle, and whatever dharma he taught his disciples was the result of the ordeals he had faced while living there.

The Venerable Acharn has long since physically passed away, but there is still a link between him and his disciples who have a tendency towards visions in meditation. It is as if he were still alive, for whenever there is an obstacle to progress in insight or meditation, he will appear in a vision to give that disciple whatever instruction or advice is necessary to overcome that obstacle, much the same way as the arahant disciples had appeared and instructed him. His instruction finished, the vision will fade, and it is then up to that disciple to ponder what he had said, to overcome that obstacle, and to progress further along the Path of Dharma.

To those who have never experienced such a phenomenon, such a link will of course seem incredible, impossible. But for those who have had such an experience and who have benefited from it, no amount of argument and no amount of logical reasoning will change matters. It must be again repeated here that only those disciples who have this tendency will experience this phenomenon, and not all disciples. An experience such as this on the part of some of his disciples, and those of the Venerable Acharn himself in listening to sermons given by the Buddha and arahant disciples, may to some extent be likened to the Buddha giving sermons to his mother Queen Maya in the Tavatimsa Heaven by means of a vision. Events concerning the Buddha, however, are more easily believed than those concerning his disciples. The writer would therefore like to say no more on this matter, leaving the truth of it to the reader's discretion, for the simple reason that whatever has been experienced firsthand is sure to be far more vivid and valid than thousands of words of argument and explanation. The writer is also of the view that one should struggle with one's utmost effort to realize firsthand that which is within one's range of receptivity. Speculations, inferences, arguments, views, criticisms all pass away with direct experience.

The Biography of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatto is drawing to an end. It hasn't been written in a formal or scholastic style, for that would be beyond the writer's capabilities. It has been quite a long story already, but it is by no means complete. Much more could be written if it weren't for the writer's limited memory. However, what has been thus far recorded from the days of his youth to that of his complete passing away, may be a source of encouragement and insight to those who have the same tendencies towards that same mode of practice.

The life of the Venerable Acharn was flawless. His was the life of a wise man in the Buddhist sense of the term. As a youth he never harmed anyone. After ordination he never ceased his efforts to firmly establish himself on the Path of Dharma until bhikkhus and lay devotees in large numbers looked up to him as their spiritual leader and master, to the last day of his life. Such a life is called *joti jotiparayano* - coming bright, going

bright, i.e. well-come and then well-gone.

His method of self-development was exemplary and resolute. He tolerated no defilements outrunning the dharma. He eliminated all defilements and was known in his circle of disciples as an arahant. Moreover, the help given by him to others was never divorced from the Path of Dharma he had himself realized, from the beginningmost step to that of Full-final Attainment. He was able to know the characters, tendencies and attitudes of those who approached him, and to adapt his instructions to suit each of them. His loving-kindness was unlimited. He extended it to all irrespective of age, sex, status or rank.

The Venerable Acharn continued to instruct his disciples to the last day of his life. His explanations never failed to throw light on the way to overcome obstacles or problems which to them seemed insurmountable. The Venerable Acharn instructed each of his disciples for the sake of their own progress and security, so that none might regret having seen such a personage, one who is supreme in the Three Worlds. His elder disciples, through his training and guidance, have been firmly established in the dharma and have now become Acharns in their own right, leading the people along the Right Path. All have large numbers of disciples in various parts of the country. And there are still other disciples who are millionaires in the dharma, but who prefer a solitary, secluded life. All these have been blessed with his instructions and his dharma.

As far as the development of human resources is concerned, the contribution of the Venerable Acharn in this field is second to none. He awakened the people to the truths of life, to what is right and what is wrong, to what is cause and what is effect, all of which are universal truths. Whether the world will develop or decline will depend on the minds of the people. Mind is the prime mover, and if it possesses right attitude, i.e. dharma, all expressions through words and deeds will be solely conducive to progress and advancement. Such a mind is developed in the way of dharma. It doesn't pay lip-service to the dharma, only repeating what it has heard, which is but the sign of an underdeveloped mind.

The Venerable Acharn understood the people who came to see him, knowing both their weaknesses and strengths. Those who understood the Venerable Acharn were all wholeheartedly impressed in him and would have been ready to sacrifice everything for his sake. Mutual understanding existed between them and their relationship was a selfless one. This again shows how the mind is the source of the greatest energy for both good and evil manifestations.

Those who are fearless of danger and death in doing whatever they have decided to do, be it good or evil, must have their minds irresistibly drawn towards it. This was also true of the Venerable Acharn's disciples, especially his bhikkhu disciples, who, having 'come to life' by his dharma, were ready to sacrifice their physical lives in following his instructions. For many who were impressed in him, the radiance of his person and the dharma of his instructions were both delightful and magnet-like. As for the writer, it seems as if the Venerable Acharn has just passed away. Many of the events of his life are still vivid in the mind's eye, and his loving-kindness still warm in the mind's body, and this despite the fact that he has been dead two decades already.

The Venerable Acharn's Final Instructions

The writer would like to bring the Venerable Acharn's biography to a close with the main points of his final instructions, from the first day of his illness to the last day of his life. His body was steadily declining in strength and vitality. He said that he had been contemplating this fact for more than sixty years, and that from the moment of his realization of the truth, there was absolutely nothing for him to be attached to or be concerned about. The body is dying from the moment of its conception. Despite our clinging to it as our own, it shows neither mercy nor leniency. It is composed of the same elements as is the external world. These final instructions were therefore warnings to his disciples.

'What I have been concerned about all this time has been those disciples who have come from far and near,' he said, 'for you may be in distress when I am gone. It is for this reason and no other that I have often told you never to be overconfident. Otherwise, you may rest self-satisfied, deluding yourself into thinking that the small amount of defilements remaining cannot do you any harm. However few in number these defilements may be, they have the potential power of giving rise to endless rebirths and redeaths. You must bring them to light and eliminate them without delay while there is still time for you to come to grips with them. Do not put off this task until it is too late. This is my warning to you.

'Have you realized where the untold sufferings of both men and animals in this world come from? They come from defilements and desires which seem so harmless and insignificant! I have delved into the origin and the results of birth, death, and other sufferings with all the capabilities of my mindfulness-and-wisdom, and have found no other breeding-ground of all these than these seemingly harmless and insignificant defilements.

Just take a look at your own minds and make an impartial observation of your attitude of mind towards these defilements. If you still regard them as trifles and are heedless towards them, then your staying with me, no matter how long, can be likened to a ladle in a pot of soup. If you wish to be the tongue which knows the taste of dharma, you must take heed of my warning. If you have wasted this opportunity, which has been yours for the taking, then your death will be more useless than the death of an animal, for at least an animal's horns, hide, and flesh can be made use of. Even living, your life is no better than that of an animal.

'I told you from the first day of my illness that I am dying. Death with detachment is the death of all worries and sufferings. There is nothing left undone and there are no expectations whatsoever. Death with defilements gives rise to a feeling of unsatisfactoriness and to a new birth, no matter what plane of consciousness it is in. As long as there are defilements there will be suffering. You should not cherish the hope of taking birth in such-and-such a realm and then delude yourself into thinking that you would be blessed and experience enjoyments there. As long as there is a grain of desire left, so long will there be the seeds of suffering lying in wait.

'It's no use being a bhikkhu if the mind is not blessed with the tranquillity of meditation. You will never experience any peace of mind if you are always overcome by defilements. Make your effort from now on to establish yourself on the Path of Dharma. Those who are courageous and patient enough to struggle against defilements, which are always in opposition to the dharma, are sure to be blessed with bliss and peace here and now within their own minds. This is the one task that can be finished. It is not endless as are the wanderings-on through rebirths and redeaths in the various planes of

becoming. Every dharma proclaimed by the Buddha is for the sole purpose of breaking away from this endless wandering-on and its consequent untold suffering.

'Those who aim at the point beyond this vicious cycle must be able to apply the truths of the three signs of being - change, flux and ownerlessness - to the Three Worlds of Becoming, where those three signs are always present. Their differences in the various planes of the Three Worlds are not in kind, but only in degree. This truth must be realized through wisdom. Attachment, however subtle and strong, can be destroyed only if wisdom is sufficiently strengthened and developed. There are no defilements in the Three Worlds that can match the strength of fully developed wisdom. The Buddha and his Noble Disciples have done exactly this.

'This is not extolling wisdom at the expense of other practice-dharmas, which are like the commissariat whose duty it is to supply the army with food, clothing and other necessities. They are themselves non-combatants, but they serve to assist the fighting forces whose duty it is to fight in the front lines. The combatant here is wisdom, which fights against defilements with the support of other practice-dharmas. It is wisdom which fights against defilements so that they will not torment an aspirant in his wandering-on through the cycle of rebirths and redeaths. An aspirant must always keep this wisdom with him.

'Wherever there is a stumbling block, it is there you must resolutely advance. Do not be afraid of death when it is the result of resolute effort to eradicate the seeds of birth and becoming from the mind. If death is to come, let it come through resolute effort. Never let it come to a defeated and demoralized fighter, for that would be a cause for regret for a long time to come. Do not worry about the world being deserted and desolate should there be no one being born to populate it. What's the use of thinking of such an absurd idea? It's because of laziness and self-indulgence that beings have to experience untold sufferings without any hope for deliverance.

'I have taught you all that I can. I have kept nothing back from you. I have explained completely and in great detail all the dharma necessary for the realization of the truth. The only things which I have sometimes discussed and explained personally are the experiences of individuals who have particular tendencies. I will always be willing to help solve any of your problems to the best of my ability until the day of my death. When I am gone it will be more difficult for you to find one who can offer you such help. There is a great gap between written and spoken dharma and the dharma manifesting within a person's mind. It is impossible for a person not having realized meditation, wisdom, the Path, Fruition and Nirvana himself to teach and lead others to such realization and Attainment!

Even as the Buddha's final instructions to his bhikkhus was 'Subject to change are all compounded things. Work out your salvation with diligence', so the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun undertook to explain this passage of the Buddha in greater detail.

'The term "compounded things" in this final instruction of the Buddha means all compounded things, but in the *context* of what the Buddha was referring to, it means that which is within a person's mind, rather than all those things external to the mind. This stresses the Second Noble Truth: the cause or arising of suffering - thoughts which cause suffering and which trouble the mind and ceaselessly disturb its peace. If such compounded things are all realized completely by wisdom, their function of cause [the breeding-ground of suffering] comes to an end. There is then nothing to disturb the

peace of the mind. Thoughts still exist, but they are thoughts which have been purified, that is, purged of the defilements of ignorance and desire. In other words, they are merely aggregates [khandha]. This may be likened to a sleep which is a state of profound and complete rest, not one which is disturbed by dreams or nightmares. It is the mind which is absorbed in inward unshakable peace and bliss [vupasama citta], which is the condition of mind characteristic of the Buddha and his arahant disciples. In this condition of mind, there is absolutely no attachment or expectation. Simultaneously with the annihilation of the defilements comes the attainment of nirvana and arahantship. Such is the wonder beyond compare in the Three Worlds.'

The Venerable Acharn never delivered another sermon again.

Apology and Blessing

All that has been recorded in the biography of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun is not the complete story of his life, it being only about seventy percent of what could be remembered and gathered from others. The remaining thirty percent has been deliberately omitted, but not without much effort on the part of the writer himself. It has been omitted because it might do many readers more harm than good, thus defeating the writer's own purpose of making this biography beneficial to as many readers as possible. Even the seventy percent which has been written here in these pages may still not be acceptable to some, and may even do some harm to others. The writer would like to ask the forgiveness of the reader for this deficiency. Another reason for not recording all that the Venerable Acharn taught was that the writer felt it improper to do so since the Venerable Acharn himself may be subject to criticism due to the writer's own immoderation.

The writer originally intended to follow the style of the ancient compilers in compiling this biography, but this has not been strictly adhered to, and thus its contents have become somewhat disorderly, following the dictates of the writer's whims rather than any recognized principle of writing. Should there be any departure from or distortion of the Venerable Acharn's teachings as given here, the writer asks the forgiveness of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun, by whose dharma the writer has 'come to life'.

May the powers of his unlimited loving-kindness be conducive to the happiness and security of all people. May all who are impressed in him be steadily encouraged to follow in his footsteps and be rewarded with the same achievement and Attainment. And may Thailand be blessed with progress and security together with the dharma of the Buddha.

Whatever criticisms there are on the part of the readers, all these will be accepted without excuse, and whatever praise or encouragement there may be will be similarly accepted with gratitude.

Should there be any benefit or merit to be obtained from these efforts by virtue of the Triple Gem, may they be shared with the readers and with those involved in the publishing of this book. May they be blessed with health, progress and fulfillment of their wishes within the scope of the Buddha-Dharma.

May BE 2514 (CE 1971)

Supplementary Notes

Note 2 - puthujjana and Noble Ones.

A worldlyling is one who has not yet attained to one of the four stages of Noble Ones, which are:

1. Stream-enterer: one who has entered the stream of nirvana. He is destined to sure and steady progress along the Path with no possibility of retrogression or decline in spiritual development and he will be born no more than seven times. He is characterized by the eradication of three of the ten spiritual fetters:

a. wrong idea regarding self or personality. The idea of self or personality is wrong when it is based on clinging to the five aggregates, name-and-form, as the real person or self.

b. doubt or hesitation. This is doubt or hesitation or uncertainty in belief in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

c. clinging to the efficacy of rites and rituals. Belief in the efficacy of rites and rituals over the effects of karma, which is a cause of superstition, black magic and ritualism.

2. Once-returner: one destined to be born in the human world only one more time (after birth in a celestial realm) and then to attain Enlightenment here. He has also eradicated the above three fetters but has minimized the remaining seven to a greater degree than has the Stream-enterer.

3. Non-returner: one destined to be born in a particular celestial realm of his own where he will attain to Enlightenment. He will not return to the human world again. In addition to the above three fetters, he has eradicated another two:

d. lustful desire. This means even the minutest grain of desire for sensual pleasure

e. irritation. This means the smallest possibility for a person to be aroused to anger

4. Enlightened One: one who has eradicated all ten spiritual fetters. His is the last birth. After the dissolution of the physical body there is no more birth for him in any plane of existence.

The remaining five fetters are:

f. delight in (subtler) forms ('form' meditation). The condition of being absorbed in ecstasy and bliss born of meditation in the level of absorption concentration. (see Note 4, b, pp. 311)

g. delight in the 'formless' meditation. A somewhat similar absorption but in a higher level. (see Note 4, c, p. 311)

h. pride or ego. Comparing oneself with others.

- i. distracting thoughts. This results from a still imperfect control of thoughts.
- j. ignorance. Ignorance of the true nature of things, tricking beings by making life appear to them as permanent, happy, substantial and beautiful, and preventing them from seeing that everything in reality is impermanent, liable to suffering, void of I and mine or self, and basically impure. It is ignorance of the Four Noble Truths: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the way to its cessation.

Note 3-patisambhida-nyana: fluency or discernment.

It is of four kinds:

- a. Fluency in giving explanations of the summarized teachings, or discernment with regards to results; that is, the ability to evaluate or envisage results by means of insight into the future.
- b. Fluency in summarizing complicated details and lengthy descriptions for the sake of quick reference and memorizing, or discernment with regards to causes; that is, the ability to trace effects back to their causes by means of insight into the past.
- c. Fluency in the use of words and language in preaching to make the teaching understandable and appeal to a wider circle of listeners.
- d. Fluency in the way of application and adaptation, that is, the possession of tact and wit, the capacity for adapting and applying a particular practice to a particular person on a particular occasion, the ability to handle any emergency or unexpected situation.

Note 4-The Three Realms.

- a. The planes of sensuality. The realms of those sentient beings whose minds are still dominated by the desire for sensual pleasures. The plane of human beings and the six celestial planes are included here.
- b. The planes of form. These planes are for those who have won some achievement in 'form' meditation (one based on contemplation of a material object). From this level onwards the mind can transcend the desire for sensuality and become absorbed in the transcendental bliss and ecstasy born of meditation.
- c. The formless planes. These planes are for those who have merged into the 'formless' meditation (one based on contemplation of an immaterial object).

These three are called the Three Planes of Existence, the Three Planes of Becoming, or the Three Worlds.

For those who have realized the Supramundane, those Noble Disciples, their plane is only called Plane of Existence and not Planes of Becoming, because their minds are incapable of retrogression.

Note 5-nimitta.

The term nimitta literally means 'mark' or 'sign'. A vision or an image here means the mark of the degree or depth of meditation or recollection of a subject of contemplation. There are three stages.

The first is called 'vision during meditation' and it is the object used in meditation, such as a corpse, a colored disc (red, yellow, etc.), a light, etc., upon which the mind is fixed.

The second is called 'created vision', which is the exact image of the object of meditation reproduced by the mind and seen in the mind's eye. This is the first stage of matter created by mind.

The third is called 'controlled vision', whereby the image created can be controlled, made larger or smaller at will, all the time being a fac-simile of the original, the difference being in scale but with strict identity in details and general structure.

Note 6-corpse

In the sequel to this biography of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun, entitled 'The Manner of Practice of the Dhutanga bhikkhu Disciples of the Venerable Phra Acharn Mun' by the same Venerable author, this point is touched on in detail and is given here for those who wish further information about it.

'When the Venerable Acharn's mind was calmed down, there appeared a vision of a festering and bloating corpse, sometimes that of his own body and at other times that of someone else, with scavengers such as vultures, crows and dogs scrambling for it. Before long it was torn to pieces and scattered all over the area. The meditation sittings which followed were based on the corpse and which he developed for greater proficiency and profundity of insight into the nature of the body.

'The Venerable Acharn's mind was by nature ultra-dynamic and highly resourceful, being inclined towards bold and dramatic adventures, and this type of meditation suited him very well. He would visualize a skeleton falling apart, each bone scattering to various places. He would then visualize those bones being collected and piled in a heap, and then being reduced to ashes. He applied this process to his own skeleton and to that which he visualized, after which his mind withdrew into the base of concentration and rested there for several hours. He repeated this process until it became automatic, responding to his will. He then applied this process to the skeleton of his body in every posture.

'These visions in his sitting meditation served as grinding stones to sharpen his mindfulness-and-wisdom, steadily enhancing his powers of meditation and contemplation. When the skeleton which he had visualized became one with that of his own body, there was no need to visualize anything 'external' to himself. His own body then became the basis of his meditation. His meditation was firmly established as well as his ability to withdraw into the base of concentration at will.

'The Venerable Acharn then ceased to use the word BUD-DHO as his subject of meditation, replacing it with the word *atthi* (bone), coupled with the formation and dissolution of the body visualized in every position. Using bone during his meditation

sittings, his body vanished. The mind was delivered from material bond. Every level of meditation was attained to at will. Insight into materiality was fully developed and could be recalled with ease. The Venerable Acharn said that this level of meditation made the mind wonderfully bright. With self-complacency, an aspirant is very likely to become absorbed in this bliss and stop there. This happens most often to those who are heedless of wisdom, and so are engrossed in this 'emptiness' or 'void', concluding that it is nirvana. Such a conclusion is reached because of the traditional assumption that nirvana is a void or emptiness, they not knowing what 'emptiness' is, or what is still lurking behind the so-called emptiness being experienced. Even at this lofty stage there are still latent subtle defilements which most craftily obstruct the mind from realizing nirvana. Thus before surpassing corporeality (internal and external matter), through a variety of contemplation processes, mindfulness-and-wisdom must revolve with the body in its every movement and moment. This contemplation of the body is centered on the three signs of being (changeability, flux, and ownerlessness), and thus the body is of great importance in this stage of practice. The more subtle an aspirant's contemplation, the more courageous he is in the course of his practice. When the searching and digging mind becomes tired, it then withdraws into the base of concentration for a temporary rest.

'Before contemplation of the body is to be considered fully developed, the body evolves into the oneness of mind. At that moment there is simultaneously the cessation of two sankharas [thoughts and moods; attitudes of mind; assumption, taking something as true]: the sankhara leading to the increase of suffering, and the sankhara leading to the cessation of suffering [including the realization of the repulsiveness of the body, its changeability, flux and ownerlessness]. Hence the separation of the assumption that the body is beautiful, attractive, etc., and the assumption that body is repulsive, ugly, etc., with the consequent passing of the mind through the 'gap' with complete detachment. Henceforth, no such [extreme emotional] assumptions can disturb [the peace and blessedness of] the mind . . . Thereafter the mind is detached from and devoid of the phenomena of materiality, both internal and external. The mind remains bathed in light supreme and continues its contemplation, based on mindfulness-and-wisdom, of the immaterial aggregates (nama) of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, all of which are continuously arising and passing away simultaneously with the mind, with ignorance, the origin or prime mover of defilements.'

Note 7-paccavekkhana.

A Buddhist monk is allowed to have only four requisites which are used properly by him only after the following contemplation on their use.

Properly considering the robe, I use it: only to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off the touch of gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles, only for the purpose of covering the shame (causing) sexual organs.

Properly considering alms-food, I use it: not playfully, nor for intoxication, not for fattening, nor for beautification; only for the continuation and nourishment of this body, for keeping it unharmed, for helping with the chaste life (thinking) I shall destroy old feelings (of hunger) and not produce new feeling (of overeating, etc.) Thus there will be for me freedom from (bodily) troubles and living at ease.

Properly considering the lodging, I use it: only to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to

ward off the touch of gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles, only for the purpose of removing the dangers from weather and for living in seclusion.

Properly considering supports for the sick - medicines and utensils I use it: only to ward off painful feelings that have arisen, for the maximum freedom from disease.

Such contemplation is to increase the monk's mindfulness of his feelings of attachment to and cravings for things which are pleasing to the eyes, ears, tongue and body, and to help him root them out of his mind with wisdom.

Note 9-walking meditation practice.

In the sequel to the Biography of the Venerable Phra Acharn by the same Venerable author, it is said about walking meditation that:

Should space not permit, the shortest track allowable was one not less than ten paces in length. A medium length track would be twenty paces, and a long track would be twenty-five to thirty paces, in length. The track should run along the east-west axis or not more than 45 degrees above or below that line. The Venerable Acharn was never seen walking on a track that ran along the north-south axis, and if he saw his disciples using such a track, he would tell them to stop. There had to be some underlying principle for his prohibiting this kind of track, since it was believed that he was able to survey the ancient practices in the time of the Buddha before he was sure of the correctness of his method and would tell his disciples to follow it.

While walking on this track, the outer robe may or may not be worn, depending upon the location of the track itself. The aspirant should not fold his arms, cross them behind his back, or swing them back and forth. He should cross them in front of him, right hand over the left, both resting below the navel. One may walk for a while and then stop if one wishes. There is no need to walk continuously. Whenever contemplation becomes profound, the aspirant may stop, even perhaps for an hour, before walking is resumed. There is also no fixed length of time for walking meditation, nor even its frequency, day or night. It all depends on the aspirant's physical health and mental requirements.

Walking meditation is for the purpose of developing meditation or the power of contemplation. It is to be based on the presence of mindfulness, without which the walking would become mechanical and robot-like.

Note 15-dhatu.

According to Buddhist analysis, the body is made up of the four elements of earth, water, fire and air.

The earth element is that which is hard, solid, and which includes hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bonemarrow, bone, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, undigested food or gorge, and excrement.

The water element is that which is liquid, fluid, and which includes bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, solid fat, tears, liquid fat, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.

The fire element is that which is heat, warmth, that is, that whereby one is warmed, one is consumed, one is burned up, and whereby what is eaten, drunk, chewed and tasted gets completely digested.

The air element is that which is motion, wind, and which includes winds going downwards, winds in the abdomen, winds in the bowels, winds that course through all the limbs, the in-breath and the out-breath.

Specifically, this meditation is used to contemplate the body in all its parts so that one may realize by means of wisdom that the physical body is not self, not mine, that it is a compounded thing, subject to decay, break up and death, and that it is a foul thing. When one realizes the body as such, one is detached from it, one does not cling to it as one's own, as belonging to oneself, nor does one hold the body to be oneself, nor oneself the body.

Note 17-preliminary instruction.

All applicants for ordination, during the ordination ceremony itself, receive a preliminary instruction from their Preceptor. The content will vary according to each Preceptor, but it can be safely stated that it will contain a short life of the Buddha and his Dharma and the Sangha, the Triple Gem to which all Buddhists go for Refuge. He will also tell the applicant the importance of the development of mindfulness-and-wisdom, the importance of keeping his monk's discipline pure, and the importance of meditation. After having received such an instruction, the applicant will be given a meditation subject which will protect his chaste monk's life with frequent contemplation. This meditation subject is one aspect of body meditation and is the five external, visible parts of the body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin.

Notes 19 and 26-The Law of Dependent Origination.

The Law of Dependent Origination is the doctrine of the conditionality of all physical and psychological phenomena, a doctrine which, together with that of not-self, forms the indispensable condition for the real understanding and realization of the teaching of the Buddha. It shows the conditionality and dependent nature of the uninterrupted flux of manifold physical and psychological phenomena of existences conventionally called the ego, or man, or animal, etc.

The formula of the Law of Dependent Origination runs as follows:

- 1-2. Through ignorance are conditioned the rebirth producing volitions or karma-formations.
3. Through the karma-formations (in past life) is conditioned consciousness (in the present life).
4. Through consciousness are conditioned the mental and physical Phenomena (nama-rupa), i.e. that which makes up our so-called individual existence.
5. Through the mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the six bases (the five physical sense organs, and consciousness as the sixth).
6. Through the six bases is conditioned the (sensorial mental) impression.
7. Through impression is conditioned feeling.
8. Through feeling is conditioned craving.

9. Through craving is conditioned clinging.
10. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming, consisting in the active and the passive life-process, i.e. the rebirth producing karma-process, and, as its result, the rebirth-process.
11. Through the (rebirth-producing karma) process of becoming is conditioned rebirth.
12. Through rebirth are conditioned old age and death (sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair).

Thus arises this whole mass of suffering again in the future.

The following diagram shows the relationship of dependence between three successive lives:

Past	1. ignorance 2. karma-formations	karma-process five causes: 1, 2, 8, 9, 10
Present	3. consciousness 4. corporeality and mentality 5. six bases 6. impression 7. feeling	rebirth-process five results: 3-7
	8. craving 9. clinging 10. process of becoming	karma-process five causes: 1, 2, 8, 9, 10
Future	11. rebirth 12. old age and death	Rebirth-process five results: 3-7

The Law of Dependent Origination in its serial order can be considered a detailed analysis of the Second of the Four Noble Truths: the cause of suffering. In its reverse order, it is thus the Third of the Four Noble Truths: the cessation of suffering. The formula of its reverse order runs as follows:

- 1-2. Ignorance ceasing, the rebirth-producing volitions or the karma-formations cease.
3. The karma-formations ceasing, consciousness ceases.
4. Consciousness ceasing, mental and physical phenomena cease.
5. Mental and physical phenomena ceasing, the six bases cease.
6. The six bases ceasing, (sensorial mental) impression ceases.
7. (Sensorial mental) impression ceasing, feeling ceases.
8. Feeling ceasing, craving ceases.
9. Craving ceasing, clinging ceases.
10. Clinging ceasing, the process of becoming ceases.
11. The process of becoming ceasing, rebirth ceases.
12. Rebirth ceasing, old age and death cease.

Thus is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

(Buddhist Dictionary by Nyanatiloka, pp. 128-136)

Note 36-kinds of arahants.

An arahant is one who is purified, an enlightened one. Arahants can be divided into four types, as follows:

1. Those who have achieved Full-final Attainment without any by-products. Their minds are absolutely purified, perfected is their task with regard to mind-development, there being for them no more rebirth. In other words, they have met the minimum requirement for such an attainment and are endowed with no additional qualities.
2. Those who have achieved Full-final Attainment with the threefold knowledges: recollection of past lives, clairvoyance (into the births and deaths of other beings), and the attainment of insight.
3. Those who have achieved Full-final Attainment blessed with the sixfold psychical feats. In addition to insight, the minimum requirement, the others are: psychic feats of all kinds (levitation, for example), clairaudience, mind-reading, recollection of past lives, and clairvoyance.
4. Those who have achieved Full-final Attainment with fluency of discernment which are four in number: fluency in giving explanations or discernment with regards to results, fluency in summarizing or discernment with regards to causes, fluency in the use of words or languages, fluency in the manners of application and adaptation.